

**TURNING  
THE TIDE OF  
INJUSTICE**

**DESMOND A. D'ABREO**

**Community Health Cell**

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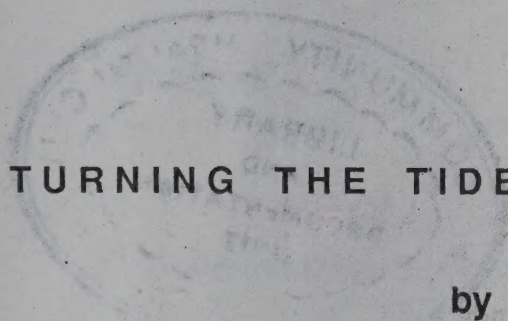




TURNING THE TIDE OF INJUSTICE  
by Desmond A. D'Abreo

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# TURNING THE TIDE OF INJUSTICE

by

**Desmond A. D'Abreo**

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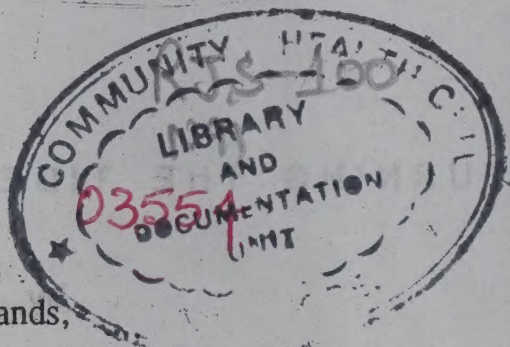
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To  
Ignatius,  
on his Fifth Birth Centenary,  
and to  
his Society on its 450th anniversary,  
for the richness in my life,  
in deepest gratitude.





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## FOREWORD

Turning the Tide of Injustice answers a felt need. When conducting seminars for young people who are eager to work for the human person's total liberation, the author increasingly felt that such work needs a solid spiritual foundation in order to be successful.

History shows that efforts at improving the situation of human beings, are likely to lead to disaster if they lack a proper spiritual foundation.

Capitalists thought that the profit motive was sufficient to lead to material progress, even when it neglected spiritual motives. The most influential economist, the great Lord Keynes, writing in 1930, thought that the day might not at all be far off when everybody would be rich. We shall then, he said, "once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful."

"But beware!" he continued, "the time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight" (Quoted by E.F.Schumacher : *Small is Beautiful*, p.20.) Keynes considered ethical consideration not merely irrelevant but as an actual hindrance. Capitalism not only led to incredible suffering of the proletariat, it led the rich countries to ruthless competition which resulted in the two great world wars. Even today, wherever the profit motive alone reigns, the rich become richer and the poor poorer. In many countries, not only in Asia and in central and South America, this leads to unspeakable suffering.

The misery caused by capitalism led to the communist movement. Communists thought they could lead the masses to prosperity by making them forget God and spiritual considerations and by directing people's minds exclusively towards material progress. The result was the enslavement of the masses who were not even allowed to think for themselves and finally it led to the poverty and starvation which we see today in the East European countries.



A mere change of structures can never lead to real prosperity. There is only one way that leads to total liberation and to the abolition of exploitation and injustice. We must rouse people's awareness of their dignity, an awareness which leads to a courageous and fearless attempt to total self-development. Real development can never come about by government action or by economic programmes. Nor can the condition of the human community be improved by gifts and alms bestowed on poor people. It has rightly been said: Charity destroys, work builds up.

There is only one way of rousing people's self-awareness of their own dignity : they must become aware that there is a divine spark within them. People must become aware that all of us have the same dignity as children of God and have to consider ourselves as brothers and sisters of equal standing, of belonging to the same family. The real way leading to social justice and wellbeing is to free people from being self-centred by making them God-centred. This is also the way by which the greatest and most successful Indian reformers brought about an improvement in India's condition, beginning from Rammohan Roy, Mahatma Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Amte and so many others.

This is also the way of Christ as Desmond D'Abreo so clearly and effectively points out in this wonderful book.

Sangamner, 13th September 1990      Hans Staffner, S.J.

## PREFACE

In our daily life, two opposing realities strike us constantly. These are poverty and affluence. While many of us who read this are quite comfortably off, there are very many around us who are indeed very poor. When we think that over forty percent of our nine hundred million Indians are living on or around the poverty line, which means that they can barely subsist, and about the same number of people are living below this line in absolute poverty and misery, the picture becomes absolutely frightening, doesn't it?

For too long have many people in the Church restricted its mission to spiritual salvation, but the realisation is deeply growing among many Christians that Christ came to save the whole human person in all his human dimensions : social, economic, political, cultural, psychological and spiritual. Hence, today we are becoming increasingly aware that the Church and every Christian has a Christ-given responsibility to strive for bringing about a total integrated development of the millions who are living and struggling in sub-human conditions.

To this purpose, many conferences, seminars and training programmes are being held in order to motivate Christians to get involved in social work.

"But, I'm tired of going to meetings and seminars and belonging to discussion groups," Anita, one of my young friends said to me after attending another social justice seminar. "I just want to help people!"

Have you ever felt like Anita? Your Christian commitment may have led you to take justice issues seriously and you have participated in a number of seminars and group discussions on these issues. But those discussion groups have become too academic, too far removed from the flesh and blood realities of our suffering world. Maybe you feel it's time for you to do what Anita did. She took a year off and joined a voluntary social work organisation in the villages of Maharashtra. You might find, like Anita, that the difficulties, challenges, and rewards of being a full-time voluntary social worker will enrich your vision and strengthen your commitment.

But, wait a minute. Before running for your toothbrush and suitcase, stop and think about whether it is really necessary for you to quit your present work and home to work with the poor. While you may feel that the only way to help the poor is by going to the villages, it is not necessarily so! You can find the oppressed anywhere, for they are on our streets, at our doorstep, or sometimes, even in our own homes, as domestic workers! A Christian cannot afford to forget that social action for the poor, needy and oppressed is not a task for just a few people who have the courage and determination to enter into the social work arena. A Christian, by his very commitment of faith, is obliged to be constantly of service to his fellow-men. "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me" is not a phrase locked up between the covers of the Bible. It is a norm of life that each and every Christian is called upon to observe.

Hence, EVERY Christian, by virtue of his faith, needs the commitment that is required of anyone involved in social work, or in work that enables the poor and oppressed to liberate themselves. To this commitment must be added the flexibility, the courage, the independence, the sense of humour that is required of anyone who is dedicated to working with others. The Christian needs first and foremost, a sharp perspective which will motivate him to devote his life to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth, to see that justice, peace and harmony are spread by him, not necessarily by going out of his environment, his work, his family and background, but in the context of his ordinary life, with the people he normally comes in contact with.

This perspective must include above all, a clear vision of the society you want to help build. There are many visions being paraded about these days : the vision of the free enterprise, market economy, of capitalism, communism, which at the moment of writing seems to be disappearing like a mirage in the Sahara, a fundamentalism that is over-reacting fascism, etc. What is the vision that you need? As a Christian, you have accepted in baptism a vision that is whole and comprehensive, that is rooted in the very essence of humanity, because it holds that you can love God only when you love your fellow-human beings, that you can express your belief in God through your faith in others, and that you can serve God when you serve your neighbour.



This book comes as a documenting of several seminars and training programmes given to various groups, both of the clergy and lay people of the Roman Catholic Church, the C.S.I., the C.N.I. and the Lutheran Church. Its roots are in a syllabus we were asked to prepare for a course on Development now being used in some seminaries in India. We hope it will help Christians to find the vision we referred to above. It has two focal points : the situation in which we are actually living and the source of God's message to us Christians, namely the Bible. It endeavours to see how these two points of reference can be linked so that Christianity can be a living reality realised in practical living in our society in India.

It is very urgent that all Christians may have a realisation of the gravity of the situation of injustice in which the majority of our people are living. It is our hope that this book may be able to deepen this realisation and help to motivate our readers to a practical involvement in their struggle for the building up of the Kingdom of justice, love and respect for the human dignity of all people.

We begin by first identifying the root cause of underdevelopment through an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural system of the country. To the problems that surface from this analysis, we try to discover God's answer as found in the Bible. For, we believe that if the Bible is God's Good News to His People, in it He should surely answer a need which people really experience and should challenge them to deal with their real life situations.

With that basis established, we will go on to assess the various approaches to development in terms of their effectivity in bringing about a 'just, participatory and sustainable society' (WCC Declaration) which all God's people are hungering for. Finally, we will go on to realise the Church's and the Christian's role in building up a people's movement for a transformation of society.

So, obviously, this is not a book to be read and be done with. Its effectiveness will be greatly enhanced if it is studied, if possible, by a group of like-minded dedicated Christians. That is why it has questions for group discussion following each section. It is hoped that through this common study and discussion, the group will arrive at some concrete action oriented towards bringing about greater justice, love and respect for the human dignity of all those they come into contact with in their daily lives.

The basis of a number of group discussions, especially those occurring in Chapter Four, is the Bible. We realise how difficult it might be for some of our readers and groups to keep referring constantly to various parts of the Bible. For that reason, we have quoted the relevant texts in full, and also included related texts in an appendix. We acknowledge the use of these quotations from The New English Bible, Oxford University Press, 1970. Occasionally, when a greater clarity is sought for in the meaning of the text, we have used the Good News Bible, The Bible Society of India, Bangalore, 1978.

Bangalore,

**Desmond A.D'Abreo**

31st July 1990.

## A Note on the Conducting of Group Meetings

We have indicated in the Preface that the ideal way of going through this book is to use it as a basis for group discussion. The regular meetings of a group working on this book will create a sense of solidarity among the members and also enhance the commitment each may have for involvement with the poor and oppressed people they come across in their own neighbourhood. Their being united in a group can certainly increase the effectivity of whatever action they may want to undertake for the poor. We also hope that a group with this spirit of solidarity and the right motivation based on Biblical foundations can ultimately form a basic Christian community, which today is an authentic and dynamic manifestation of the Church. What we would like to elaborate in this note are the various points and questions that may arise with regard to the initiation and the maintaining of such a group.

### Who forms the Group?

The ideal number for an effective group discussion and interaction would be from seven to ten members. In this number, the participants are in a better position to relate directly to one another and to express themselves freely by asking questions, sharing insights and experiences. Also, the number will be large enough to allow for a certain diversity of opinion. If they were to be a smaller group, the danger would be that there would not be much difference in opinion and hence the discussions would not be effective.

From a practical point of view, it might be good to have more than ten members, so that possible absenteeism could be foreseen. In such a situation, even if a few are absent, the life of the group would not be affected.

It would be preferable if all the group members were to belong to the same age group, with a similar educational background, income bracket, etc. But when dealing with a topic like development, in which one of the basic principles is that the poor must be the masters of their own destiny and the agents of their own development and liberation, it might be helpful to have some members who belong to an economically lower sector of society. They would bring a realistic contribution to the discussions on poverty, its root causes and also on its possible solutions. Care must be taken, however, if such persons are members of this group,



that they are not "patronised" by the others. They must be seen as equal partners with the other members in every way and should be made to feel at home in as natural a way as possible.

Where do we have our meetings?

What would be the best place to have these meetings? The most familiar places are the homes of the members. It would be good to have a rotation of meetings in each one's home. But this might not always be possible, for in some of the small homes or flats now common in our cities, there is hardly place for even the resident members of the family! In some homes, too, there might be problems in the family, of difficult relationships, etc., which would make it very embarrassing for the member of the group to invite the others over for a meeting.

Another difficulty that people may have in hosting a meeting in their home is the subtle competitiveness that may surge within the group, especially in hospitality and the way of serving refreshments during the meeting. While one may only serve a cup of coffee, the next will add biscuits, and the third will add cake, and so on, till the competition may become unbearable for some of the members. To avoid this from the very beginning, the group can decide on certain norms with regard to the organisation of the meetings.

Possibly, to avoid all these difficulties, the group may decide on a fixed place for the meetings where there are better study conditions, like light, space and silence. This could perhaps be a room in a school or college, or in the parish hall. But whichever it may be, it should be centrally located and accessible to all the members.

How often does the Group meet?

The group must fix beforehand the number of times they are going to meet each month. This should be much more frequent than once a month, for this rare getting together would not help the group spirit to develop. Besides, the members will easily forget what they have learned, and there will be a lack of continuity in the study and reflection undertaken by the group. Twice a month could be a practical minimum. In this context, it would be good also to evaluate after each set of eight or ten sessions what is happening in and to the group, whether the members are interested and want to continue or not, and from there on to plan for the next eight to ten sessions.

As for the time when these meetings could take place, for most working people, the best time appears to be Sunday morning. For a group consisting of students, a fixed period during the week might be more convenient for all in the school or college itself. But, whatever time is decided upon, it is the availability of members that matters. The duration of the meetings is another point to be decided upon well in advance. Generally, a meeting should not go beyond an hour and a half. If prolonged regularly beyond this limit, the meeting would draw people away from other important work or programmes they may have, and hence, there may be a tendency to drop out.

How can one start such a group?

We would insist that such a group is not formed through an institution, or officially at the behest of a pastor, parish priest or bishop, or attached to any institution, like a Vincent de Paul society or any other parish organisation. Such a start will consciously or unconsciously tend to institutionalise a group and make it absorb the traditional theology or vision of the faith which is more clerical and elitist. It must be formed under the initiative of anyone eager to bring people together for regular reflection on social justice. This does not preclude having recourse to a member of the clergy who is open and keeps abreast with modern theological trends and scriptural interpretations when points need to be clarified.

Common experience shows that the best way of starting any group for study or discussion, or for a common action, is through personal contact. The one who takes the initiative can personally invite a few people to join the group, after explaining the objective to them. He can tell them also to invite their friends, or those who they think will be interested.

Once the meetings get under way, word will get around, and the topics the group discusses may begin to attract others. These may also approach members of the group and ask if they can join. We should not be afraid even to seek out new members. Unless an effort is made to expand, the group may become closed in on itself and growth will be hampered. Any group needs the challenge of new participants. Perhaps one or two people will have to spend extra time to help them to cover previous matter, and show them how to prepare for new meetings, but it

will be worth it. If the group becomes too big, one day it will have to be divided. This is definitely a sign of growth!

### Animating the Group

What distinguishes a group from a mass of people is the fact that its members are aware of the common goal they pursue. Hence there is a need of specifying their objectives. The one who undertakes to animate the group must start by helping the group to clarify these objectives. His or her second task will be to help the group to coalesce. From the outset, the group members may experience different kinds of feelings towards one another : sympathy, indifference or even antagonism. The animator will have to conduct a few exercises to build up the group spirit, to increase communication, interpersonal relationship, collaboration, trust building, etc. There are a number of books available which have a collection of such games and exercises.

In order that the meetings run smoothly it is advisable that all the members, besides the animator, prepare for each meeting. In this preparation, he might have to make a special effort to foresee the various points that may come up for discussion. This might even necessitate prior consultation with some local expert. However, to put at rest any fears of having to go often into specialised consultation, we would like to affirm that we have tried to make every aspect of the book self-explanatory so that no outside consultation may be required.

Experience has shown us that this preparation is not as tough as it might sound. All it implies is to reflect briefly on the topic which will be under discussion in the coming meeting and seeing how one's life experience is in any way linked up or related to it. For the success of a group discussion is not measured by the number of ideas, however original, thrown up in it, but by the rich variety of personal experiences of the participants that are shared in the group. Hence, such a preparation by all is really needed, and we feel that if a group member does not take care to do a minimum preparation for the meeting, he will be a silent observer - which is the bane of any group discussion. It could be very useful if each meeting ended with a brief evaluation. This could cover the way in which the members participated, the role of the animator and the main issues and topics which stood out in the discussions.



# How to participate in a Group Discussion

## 1. The Animator or Facilitator of a discussion

- a. He must stimulate the members to think and encourage them to express themselves.
- b. He will put together the contributions made by the members so that each has a sense of participation and the group as a whole has a sense of progress and direction in the discussion.
- c. He helps the silent to speak up while curbing those who talk too much.
- d. He does not answer all the questions himself, but refers them back to the group.
- e. At regular intervals he summarises the progress of the discussion, pulls the threads together and points out to the group how far it has come and how far it still must go to reach a final conclusion.
- f. While summing up and getting agreement on conclusions of the discussion, he avoids any manipulation or domination.
- g. While asking questions, to avoid the discussion rambling on in the abstract, he will solicit personal concrete experiences.
- h. Does his best to create and sustain a climate of acceptance, trust, sympathy and tolerance in the members.

## 2. The Secretary or Reporter

- a. Should report what the group discussed.
- b. Report should be brief, accurate, without unnecessary words, phrases, or points which were ruled out by the team.
- c. Should read out the report to the group at the end of every point discussed and at the end of each session.

### 3. Group Members

- a. Every member should realise that if he does not make any contribution
  - his contribution is lost to the world
  - the discussion becomes incomplete or poor
- b. If any member of the group is too talkative, dominating the whole discussion, he might silence his timid companions
- c. Each one should participate in the group discussion with an open mind. While sharing his own knowledge and experiences, he should bear in mind that others too have knowledge and experience to share from which he too can learn.
- d. In order that the discussion be rooted in reality, every member should base his statements and opinions as far as possible on experience, that is either his own or of others he can vouch for. Without this basis of experience, the discussion can easily deteriorate into an academic exercise that has no value for real life praxis or action.
- e. Opinions and views might differ but this need not or should not lead to angry words and loss of temper
  - your own views and opinions may grow richer if you patiently listen to others and learn what is good in them
  - your ideas could always differ from others, but learn the art of differing
  - be in complete control of yourself.
- f. The end of the discussion should leave the members of the group knit closer to each other because of their having opened their hearts and minds to each other in greater understanding and love.

(cf. D'Abreo, D. : Group Discussion and Team Building, St. Paul Publications, 1991)

#### The First Meeting

The first meeting of the group is a crucial one for it sets the tone for the following work of the group and at the same time either wins

people to or repels them from the group and its efforts. Care must therefore be taken, especially by the animator, to see that it is well prepared. He must remember that most of the members are unfamiliar with the subject and hence usually feel insecure. They are not sure of those whom they are going to meet. They are also insecure about themselves as to whether they will be up to the mark or not.

The animator must create a welcoming atmosphere. The place in which this meeting is to be held must be clean, well-lighted and free of distractions and interruptions. The chairs must be arranged in a close circle, so that as people come in they find themselves near to the others who will be part of the group. Depending on the type of group that is being formed, some soft background music might help to sustain the right atmosphere, but then, care must really be taken that this music be appropriate!

When people enter, the animator must be there to welcome them and make them feel at home. He will introduce newcomers to those who had arrived before. After a few minutes of informal conversation, he can invite the participants to express their expectations of the group and of its meetings and to share the motivations which led them to join the group. This is the best way of creating a sense of solidarity among them.

If at the first meeting, there are only four or five members, each one will be invited to double the number by inviting their friends who they think might be interested. If there is a large number, the animator can start an ice-breaking game, through which each one introduces himself or herself. A variant of this introduction could be that the group splits up into pairs, each pair has a few minutes of self-introduction and then when the group gets together, each one introduces his or her partner to the rest of the group.

With these few introductory notes, we leave it to the readers to set forth on what we hope will be an interesting and useful adventure.





# CHAPTER ONE

## The Christian Vision

### Section 1. The Christian Vision of a Human Person

Everyone of us needs to have a vision which he or she must strive to achieve. Without such a vision, our life will be aimless, wasted in inane and useless activity. A person without a vision can be caught up in the day-to-day battle against a particular difficulty or a peripheral issue and he or she will never be able to move forward or make any meaningful progress because of the absence of any long-term goals.

"To direct one's life towards a goal is of vital importance. There is nothing in the world, I dare say, which would so effectively help people to survive and keep healthy as would the knowledge of a life-task. Thus we can understand the wisdom in the words of Nietzsche, 'They who have a "why" to live for, can bear almost any "how"'"

Victor Frankl

The very fact that you want to read a book like this indicates that you have a vision which manifests itself in your concern for the development and liberation of the many people in our country who live in poverty and misery. But in order to be effective, this concern should find a direction through our perspective of what a human person should really be, according to the mind of his Creator. The goal of our efforts for the development of these our people should be to enable them to live according to the will and intention God had in mind when he created them. God himself expressed this vision, which we find in the very first chapters of the Bible.

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image and likeness to rule the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all wild animals on earth, and all reptiles that crawl upon the earth.' So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

This text tells us that the human person is made to the image and likeness of God. This specific nature of the human person as God's image is seen in the faculties that he or she has which differentiate the human being from all other living creatures.

The first of these faculties is that of being able to reflect and think. Another faculty specific to human beings is that of freely and selflessly loving others and forming associations with other human persons. The third, which we feel is of greatest importance because it makes us most like God, is the ability freely to take our own decision in all matters concerning every aspect of human life, be it the home, our community, or the economic, social, political, cultural, spiritual and religious sphere.

Questions for Discussion :

1. What are the factors in our society that prevent people from reflecting on their own? (e.g. traditional beliefs and practices, educational system, the mass media, etc.)
2. How can we help people to use this faculty of reflection to their fullest?
3. In what way is the ability to love specific to human beings? Why is this faculty and its use the basis of an authentic reorganisation of society?
4. Would you say that the ability to decide is the greatest treasure that a human person has? Why? What factors in our society prevent our people from using this faculty of deciding in all aspects of their human life?
5. Could we say therefore that personal human development is the ability of a human being to exercise these three faculties freely and that underdevelopment is the situation where he or she is prevented from the free exercise of these faculties of reflecting, loving and deciding?



## Section 2 :The vision of Community Development

What is the meaning of the phrase, "image and likeness of God"? This specific nature of the human person as God's image is seen in the faculty he or she has of freely reflecting and reasoning, of freely and selflessly loving, relating and associating with others and of freely taking decisions in every aspect of human life.

It is significant that the text in Genesis states, "Let US make man..." It seems to indicate that the creation of man was the work of the Trinity. Whether this is a definite message of the text or not, it does enable us to nurture the idea that the human person is created to the image and likeness of God not only in the areas of reflecting, loving and deciding but also in his social nature. The human person is by essence a social being.

"No man is an island" said the seventeenth century English poet, John Donne. A human being cannot develop to the fullness of his or her personality except in the society of other human beings. The Trinity is not a society of uniformity but of diversity. If this diversity is destroyed, the very essence of the Trinity is negated. In the image of the Trinity, human society is made up of various persons, each one with his or her own capacities and potentials, background and talents. A true human society imaged on the Trinity, respects the autonomy and originality of each person, and accepts the contribution each one can make to the community.

At the same time, there is a deep relation of love and unity which theological reflection tells us is the binding force that knits the three Persons into one nature. So too, human society patterned on the divine society, while respecting the diversity of each human person, is knit together by bonds of unity, love and solidarity. This respect for each one's specificity and at the same time the love and solidarity among members of the human community are what make human beings different from all other creatures on earth.

Since man is a social being, every development programme must be oriented not to individuals but to the community. Individual programmes tend to make people exploiters of those who have not benefited as they have.

This vision of the Human Person and of society as created to the image and likeness of God, gives us our goal and a rationale for all our work in the field of development. It also gives us an operational yardstick for evaluating any development programmes. Above all, this vision presents us with a mandate to share. As persons we share by moving from "I can" to "We can". This sharing must be dynamic, using the people's energy, which for centuries has been disregarded and therefore in many communities, atrophied. Basically, this sharing must be our goal : to impart life, and life in all its fullness. (cf. John 10:10.)

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. From your own experience, can you substantiate the statement that "a human being cannot develop to the fullness of his or her personality except in the society of other human beings"?
2. Would you agree that individual development programmes tend to make people exploiters of those who have not benefited as they have? Are there any examples you can think of to confirm this?
3. What is the vision you can draw of a society that we can build up in which every human person can freely exercise his or her faculties of reflecting, loving and deciding and of doing so in a spirit of community?

### Section 3 : The Right Relationships in a Just Society

We frequently use words like "just" or "justice", but many of us will be forced to confess that we either do not know exactly what they mean, or that we give very incomplete definitions of these words. Justice really is the giving to each his due, and it therefore implies the establishment of the right relationships that a person must have with others. In a deeper sense, justice implies that a person has the right relationship with his maker, God, with his fellow human beings and with nature.

When God created the first human beings, he endowed them with these right relationships. A relationship of friendship existed between God and man, which is expressed through a very oriental image : "God walked with Adam in the cool of the evening". The relationship with fellow human beings is concretised in the close relationship between Adam and Eve. Man's being able to "give a name to each animal" is the cultural expression of his time through which the biblical writer indicated man's dominion over all living creatures. Here we might note that the phrase "Increase and multiply and subdue the earth" is not to be taken in the consumerist sense these words have acquired today, but rather as a promise of blessing and fruitfulness which are the outcome of good management or stewardship by the human race over animate and inanimate nature.

But the first human beings were not content with the privileges and gifts they received from God. They wanted to abrogate to themselves the power that belongs solely to God, namely the right to decide what is good and evil, and to differentiate between right and wrong independently from God. This has been symbolically narrated in the story of the tree of good and evil and the eating of the apple, the fruit of this tree.

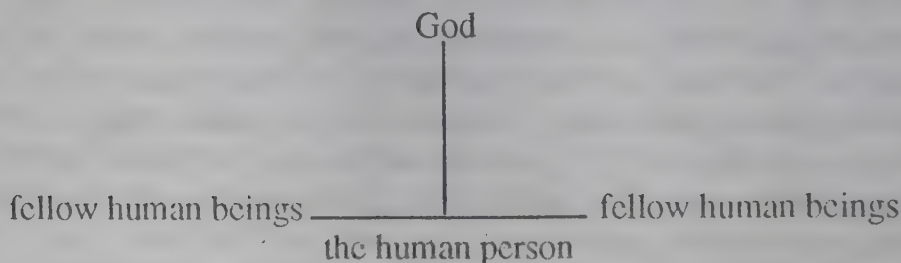
With this act of rebellion against God, the human race, as represented by the first human beings, destroyed the relationship with God which he had established with them. Since this is a fundamental relationship on which all the others depended, all other relationships of the human persons went awry. To start with, the relationships within the family were distorted by pain and suffering as expressed in the third chapter of Genesis; the relationships among persons was destroyed, as was symbolically described in the story of Cain and Abel. Again, symbolically, the story of the Flood showed that nature rebelled against



the human race. Finally the antagonism between nation and nation is depicted in the story of the Tower of Babel. The whole system is corrupted and injustice is inherent in it. This means that the system in which we live at present is based on relationships that are not right, and the values on which this system is founded are pseudo-values which are the opposites of the values which make for a just, participatory and stable society.

But, God still wanted to rebuild the bridges that were destroyed, so he sent his Son to release life into the world and counteract the effects of the Fall. Jesus summarised in his very person and in his life the basic core or fundamental values on which human society has to coordinate itself. The Son of God became the man Jesus in order to initiate the process of bringing about the original justice in which man was created. Justice is not equality nor redistribution of resources, but is rather the restoration of right relationships. Hence, it is important to realise that justice is an operative reality for socio-economic coordination. Just as injustice that prevails in our society today is a structural reality, inherent in the very system, so the justice that we should strive for must be an operative reality for socio-economic coordination. It must be a structural reality.

Jesus through his own actions, teachings and life, death and resurrection, re-established the roots of the relationships which man enjoyed at his creation. But every human person has now to cooperate in making these relationships blossom into reality. By means of the spirit and grace or strength which Christ gives to all who love his Father, the human person must rebuild the vertical relationship with God through the strengthening of his constant horizontal relationship with his fellowmen. By seeing and loving God in the "least of his brethren," he will be able to regain his relationship with God and rebuild all the other relationships with which God endowed our first parents.



The rebuilding of this two-fold relation is the basis for coordinating and reconstructing the socio-economic, political and cultural system which prevails in our society. Therefore, every activity of ours must be examined in respect to how it affects our neighbour and whether it fulfills or breaks the second great commandment: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself!

Some say that this people-centred orientation is engaged mainly in the material and ignores the spiritual dimension of humanity. But, experience shows that a person cannot persevere for long in this other-centred life orientation unless he has the grace that comes from God to love his neighbour. An authentic love for one's neighbour must be based on the search for and love of God. Hence the very foundation of social work is this love which is built up on a life of prayer and union with God. "The more I find Christ in the Gospels, the more I find in him the slums, and the more I look for him in the slums, will I truly discover him in the Gospel." (Paulo Freire)

The neighbour we must particularly be concerned about is the neighbour who is deprived of his human dignity, who is a victim of the inhumanity of his fellowmen, helpless, neglected and oppressed : 'the alien, the widow, the orphan,...' whom the Bible constantly refers to.

As a matter of fact, the fundamental criterion according to which a Ruler or King was judged in the Old Testament was whether he was 'Shepherd of his flock, Father to the fatherless and Protector of the protectionless'. The stranger and foreigner are seen as a neighbour. Though this is an ancient norm, it contains no element of closed-up communalism or antagonism to those who do not belong to one's race or group which is growing and becoming so widespread in our country today. It is interesting to note that this norm was promulgated at a time when xenophobia was very strong in the prevailing cultures of those times! In the New Testament, this xenophobia or antagonism was contradicted by Christ in the parable of the Good Samaritan through which he answered the question, 'Who is my neighbour?'

Questions for Discussion :

1. Have we been able to see the connection between the relationship we build with God and the relationship we have to other people, to other

living creatures and to nature? Has this connection been evident in our way of life, in our dealings with others, with the environment?

2. Could the criterion by which a King was judged in the Old Testament be the criterion according to which a Christian should be judged? Why or why not?

3. Do you think that this people-centred orientation follows along the spirituality taught us by Christ and the writers of the New Testament or does it run contrary to it? What are the reasons for your answer?



## Section 4 : Love : The Basis of Human Relationships

The reality that cements all the efforts of coordinating the socio-economic, political and cultural system is love. Its source is the love of God and its expression is the love of neighbour. There are four fundamental aspects or facets of love:

- a. The sense of Otherness - consideration for others,
- b. The sacrificial - sharing of self,
- c. The forgiving aspect and
- d. The cleansing and sanctifying aspect which is ultimately oriented to the building of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The process of building this Kingdom must move towards a fulfilment. This is the basis of Christian hope which is its animating force. Christ has initiated the movement towards justice, but this justice cannot be achieved unless his initiative is taken up by those imbued by his spirit of other-centred, sacrificial, forgiving, cleansing and sanctifying love.

For example, Jesus' teaching on God as Father in the context of hunger in India calls people to trust in God as the provider of their needs while they engage themselves in His service. Thus God's Fatherhood relieves them of anxiety. But at the same time it challenges the Church and Christians to prove the reality of God by demonstrating his power to provide material needs in the context of the power struggle that prevails in the country. If the Christians in our country can actually put into practice the commitment made at baptism to become members of a community that shares with all in need, the problem of injustice and inequity will be eliminated to a great extent.

The vision of this Kingdom was the vision that Isaiah described which very clearly and poetically depicts the dream that most people have in today's world of strife and disunity:

Isaiah 2: 2-4

In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be set over all other mountains,  
lifted high above the hills.

All the nations shall come streaming to it,  
 and many peoples shall come and say,  
 'Come, let us climb up on to the mountain of the Lord...  
 The Lord will be judge between nations,  
 arbiter among many peoples,  
 They shall beat their swords into mattocks  
 and their spears into pruning-knives;  
 Nation shall not lift sword against nation  
 nor ever again be trained for war.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Would you agree that justice is the building and sustaining of right relationships of human persons with God, neighbour and nature? From your own experience, could you narrate a few examples which show that justice flows from right relationships and injustice from the destruction of these relationships?
2. The relationship with God is the foundation of all other relationships. But this relationship cannot be authentic unless it is realised in the relationships of love we have with other persons. Would you agree with these statements? Do you see any contradiction in that the relationship with God is the foundation and yet is realised only in the relationship with others?
3. We speak and hear so much today about love. Does this love always imply the four characteristics mentioned above? Can you cite from your own experience some examples of love which have these four characteristics?
4. Why, according to the Bible, should primary importance be given to love and concern for the poor, the neglected and the oppressed?
5. Is the dream of Isaiah realisable as long as we are on earth? Who should be responsible for making it realisable? What is to be our role in making this dream a reality?

### Liberating Love

Though I preach the sacred value of human life,  
 If I sit on my hands and watch the oppression of my people  
 I am a hypocrite.  
 Though I approve the goals of human liberation

and profess love for freedom, if I do not act on  
this love, it is worthless.

Though I think I can tell which way the wind is blowing,  
if I let the

Moment to act pass me by, I betray the imperative to  
love.

The people have suffered long, charity serves barely  
to keep them alive.

Charity by itself defuses the will of the people to act.

Love is not defined from a book or a tradition - it  
does not rest in its own abstract goodness, it is  
shaped by the concrete needs of the people.

True love abhors evil; it rejoices in the struggle for  
the good.

On the path to triumph, love can bear all things, will  
hope all things;

It will not surrender.

Our need for justice and human dignity is as dear as  
life itself: if there are political slogans they shall  
fade away; if there are exploitative economic  
systems they shall crumble and be changed.

For mankind cannot live by slogans alone.

Man's right to freedom and dignity is not a flight from  
God,

Thus, when people together demand liberation,  
that which oppresses shall give way.

For before I knew what it meant to have dignity, I  
could neither see clearly nor love freely. But when  
I began to struggle, I discovered the true meaning  
of Love.

When we were slaves, we spoke as slaves, we  
understood as slaves, we thought as slaves, but as  
we became free, we cast off all the chains of servitude

So Faith, Love and Hope must abide, these three;  
but without freedom and dignity they remain  
hollow shadows.

President Canaan Banana: The Gospel  
according to the Ghetto, p.15



## Section 5. Building the Earth.

"The sense of the earth opening and exploding upwards into God; and the sense of God taking root and finding nourishment downwards into Earth. A personal, transcendent God and an evolving universe no longer forming two hostile centres of attraction but entering into conjunction to raise the human mass on a single tide. Such is the sublime transformation which we may with justice foresee."

Teilhard de Chardin : Building the Earth, p.75

"When we deal with that familiar humdrum reality, the world of human beings, it is necessary to remember in some way that we are dealing with extraordinary things, beyond the imagination of science fiction. This is a fact to which poetry, familiar wisdom and the tradition of nations all attest. Human beings are creatures who are free, immortal, loved by God; creatures who are historical, who have a past and also a future, who are called to work for a kingdom of love and justice. To say they are historical is also to say that they are dynamic.... They are actually creating a world, a more human world. Moreover, in the activity of doing this, in the process of struggling to build community and justice, persons themselves are changed, they mature, the whole human family grows up....

"However wrong, corrupt and even destructive human societies may have become, we can't lose sight of the fact that its true task and the service to which we must recall it, is the fullness and freedom of the human person..

"The political community and all its institutions matter so much because they must serve the greatness and beauty of the human person and the human hope, because men and women are made for love and joy, for growth and expansion, because the capacity and promise of men and women is so great, because they have a word and a kingdom to build, and it is only in society that they can do so."

-Mandlekhosi Zwane, Bishop of Swaziland, from a report of the IMBISA workshop on the Church and social justice, 1979.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul gives a clear and detailed indication of the vision that those who are called to follow in the spirit of Christ must endeavour to realise:

#### Colossians 3:12-17

Then put on the garments that suit God's chosen people, his own, his beloved : compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Be forbearing with one another, and forgiving, where any of you has cause for complaint : you must forgive as the Lord forgave you. To crown all, there must be love, to bind all together and complete the whole. Let Christ's peace be arbiter in your hearts; to this peace you were called as members of a single body. And be filled with gratitude. Let the message of Christ dwell among you in all its richness. Instruct and admonish each other with the utmost wisdom.

Ultimately, the vision the Christian has is the vision of the Kingdom that Christ came to establish.

"The Kingdom of God undoubtedly possessed a political connotation for the Jews, for whom politics was a part of religion, and the Kingdom of God concretely designed liberation from all oppressive forces.

"Like Jesus, the church ought to give special attention to the nobodies and those without a voice. It should emphasise the future that he promises for this world, a world in which the future kingdom is growing between the wheat and the cockle, not for a few privileged people, but for all."

"Jesus' Kingdom cannot be reduced to a part of reality such as politics. He came to heal all reality, in all its dimensions, cosmic, human and social...He signified something much more profound, namely that he demands a conversion of persons and

a transformation of the human world; that he demands a love of friends and enemies alike and the overcoming of all elements inimical to God and humankind."

Leonardo Boff: *Jesus Christ Liberator*, pp. 58,46,60

The book of Revelation paints a very striking image of the vision towards which we are to strive to realise, with the help of God:

#### Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: Now at last God has his dwelling among men! He will dwell among them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes; there shall be an end to death, and to mourning and crying and pain; for the old order has passed away.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. What are the characteristics of the vision of a perfect society that each of these above texts indicate?
2. What is the kind of society we look for?
3. What are its economic, social, political, cultural dimensions?
4. What are the values which form the basis of a just, participatory and sustainable society?



## Section 6. Hope

The process of coordinating the present socio-economic, political and cultural system must move with a sense of direction. It must move towards a fulfilment - which is the Kingdom. Hence it is founded on hope. The basis of this hope is that God acts with all people of good will in the world, moving in the world.

Robert Mugabe, Prime Minister of Zimbabwe said in 1982: "The problem with the church is that it does not have enough hope." If Christian communities really have faith that we are not left to do this work alone, that God is present in all the struggles of those with goodwill, for transformation, if we believe that the promises will come true that the Kingdom will come, then we could bring to this struggle the greatest imaginable gift, the Gift of Hope.

### Hope for a Better World

It is time we stopped talking of despair  
and started living in hope.

It is time that we started reading and hearing more  
of the good that people can do for themselves  
and for others.

There are far more good Samaritans in this world  
than there are destroyers.

We must not let the public pessimism of a few  
destroy the optimism of  
many.

It is this flame  
that will illumine hope  
for all people.

It is this hope  
that will bring about  
a new and better world.

Easter is a protest against  
despair and dejection  
Faith in the resurrection  
means

- not resigning oneself to the 'hard facts'
- refusing to put up with the status quo and what, humanly speaking, is feasible.

- International Catholic Information, May 1976

From Martin Luther King's Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech:

I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centred men have torn down, other-centred people can build up. I still believe that one day humanity will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive goodwill will proclaim the rule over the land. And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid. I still believe that we shall overcome."

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why does Robert Mugabe say that the Church has not got enough hope? Would you agree with him?
2. What do you understand by hope? Does the quotation from the International Catholic Information throw any light on the meaning of hope?
3. The basis of hope is that God acts in the world, moving in the world. Is this the basis of the hope expressed by Martin Luther King?
4. The world today, with its consumerist values, the increase of factionalism, communalism, violence, cruelty, oppression of the weaker sectors of society, seems to be rapidly destructive of anything that is truly human and noble. How is it possible for us to have a genuine hope that humanity can really move towards the fulfillment, which is the Kingdom? What can we do in our own small way to help towards this fulfillment?

## Setting out on the road

"Setting out is first of all getting out of oneself:

Breaking through the shell of selfishness hardening us within our own ego.

To stop revolving round oneself as if we were the centre of everything.

Refusing to be ringed in by the problems of our own small world. However important these may be, humanity is more important and our task is to serve humanity.

Setting out is not covering miles of land or sea, or travelling faster than the speed of sound. It is first and foremost opening ourselves to other people, trying to get to know them, going out to meet them.

Opening ourselves to ideas, including those with which we disagree, this is what the good traveller should do. Happy are those who understand the words, 'If you disagree with me, you have something to give me'.

If those who are with you always agree with you before you open your mouth, they are not companions but shadows. When disagreement is not a form of systematic blocking, when it rises from a different vision, it can only enrich us.

It is possible to travel alone. But the good traveller knows that the journey is human life and life needs company. 'Companion' means the one who eats the same bread. Happy are those who feel they are always on the road and that everyone they meet is their chosen companion. Good travellers take care of their weary companions. They guess when they lose heart. They take them as they find them, listen to them, intelligently, gently, above all, lovingly, then encourage them to go on and recover their joy in the journey.

To travel for the sake of travelling is not the true journey. We must seek a goal, envisage an end to the journey, an arrival.



But there are journeys and journeys. For the Abrahamic minorities, setting out means to get moving and help many others get moving to make the world juster and more human."

Dom Helder Camara : The Desert is Fertile, p.15

## CHAPTER TWO

### Indian Society Today

#### Section 1. Making A Structural Analysis of Indian Society

The Document on Revelation of the Second Vatican Council refers significantly to the 'signs of the times'. Would you be able to say what these signs are? These are the outward indications of a deeper reality that is at work in our societal system. The poverty we see around us is a sign of the injustice that is prevalent in every aspect of our socio-economic system.

In order to really understand what is the actual situation of the country and of the area in which we live, it is very important that we recognise these signs of the time and discern what are the realities behind them. This we do when we make a structural analysis of the area. Structural analysis is not just an academic exercise. It is meant to provide a tool for action. It derives from a scientific approach to reality and it provides the basis for a systematic knowledge of society.

Social action must be based on social knowledge which comes from a deep analysis of society. Many of our development programmes do not meet with success because they lack this analysis. Such an analysis must have two factors. First, it is necessary to organise social knowledge. This means that we have to collect all the facts relevant for a social awareness. In order that this be done systematically, we need tools for analysis. These tools are provided by the questionnaires that follow. Secondly, organised knowledge must be interpreted. It is not just a matter of spouting statistics and saying that so many per cent are below the poverty line and so many are without one meal a day. These numbers only take on meaning if their causes are identified.

This analysis is not a monopoly of social scientists. It has to be democratised. The people at the lowest strata of society should be helped to understand critically their situation. People without this knowledge are powerless, and if they act, their action will not be directed to the root of their problem. Hence it will be ineffective, and may even be counterproductive. It is such critical awareness deriving from a deep structural analysis that can lead to social power.

To have a correct reading of the signs of the times, our analysis of society must aim at making clear the dehumanising character of the present social system as a whole, and not just stop with its superficial inadequacies. It is not sufficient, therefore, to make a study of the widespread poverty or illiteracy in India, but rather to see their structural causes and show how these causes are contrary to the very essence of human nature. Here, we will see the need of studying not only what is externally manifest, but also the vision and ideology underlying these external realities.

It is very important that our analysis have a prophetic character. It should, like the prophets of old, proclaim and denounce the evils at the root of the system and at the same time bring out the long-term consequences that this system has for human persons who are to fulfill themselves as the image and likeness of God.

While doing a structural analysis, it is important to remember that we have to approach the social reality as a whole. It would be useless to look at only one aspect, like the economic, or the cultural aspect and leave out other aspects like the political, or the social. Society is a systematic whole, an inter-related set of systems, like the economic, social, political, educational, health, ideological, religious, etc. Any element of this system finds its social meaning in the whole, for it has a function with respect to other elements of the system. It is only when we see the whole picture and the inter-linking of various factors that we will be able to discover the most effective approach to be followed to bring about an authentic social transformation.

Consequently, we can see that there are four steps we have to take to do a structural analysis of India. First, we have to start from the conscious phenomena that we can see and touch. From here we move to the infrastructure that is not so apparent, but which is the foundation of what can be externally perceived. From here we go on to identify the various elements that constitute a society and realise that they are not completely independent entities. We then focus the analysis on the systematic inter-relationships of the elements, the inter-relationships of their structure and their institutionalisation. Finally, we can derive a general law or conclusion from the analysis about the root cause of the underdevelopment, oppression and misery of the majority of our population. ²



To spell out the situation in our country in a structural analysis is a rather satisfying intellectual exercise. And there, precisely lies the danger : it may not go into the personal dimension. The people who are at the bottom of the economic pyramid are not just statistics but actual persons, created to the image and likeness of God. We need to realise that God means it when he says "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers you do to me". It therefore implies that we recall and see in the concrete happenings of today a concerned God, an involved God and a suffering God.

We find this God here, today in our cities, in our villages, in our India and in our world. He is suffering, crying out at the pain we are inflicting on him. If we take his word seriously and live out our faith, we find him in the poor, the afflicted, those in pain and in the needy. But let us not be generalising. God is there suffering in those children whose labour is being exploited in the match factories, in the carpet industries, in the hundreds of small restaurants in our cities. He is in the women being raped of their dignity or burned because of insufficient dowry. He is in the landless labourer in the field and in the contract labourer or domestic worker who is being robbed of the price of his or her labour. He is in those who are victims of the flames of rabid communal fires. He is in all those and also in each of the others we come into contact with in our daily lives, whom we see and who we know are suffering.

To find God in these people requires a faith that goes far deeper than our religion. It goes beyond that culture or those values of feeling good, because we go regularly to church, and fulfill the commandments. It is a faith that is something much more challenging : it implies having the courage to reach out our hand to a suffering God some place today. It is a faith that is more risk-taking than just giving a financial assistance for the suffering God to have a little relief. It implies looking for the root cause of his suffering and oppression and working with him or her to attack this root cause.

But, to live such a faith is not going to win the approval of others. It will set off wagging tongues. It might raise opposition even from the ones we love or look up to as our superiors. But, that is always the lot of those who strive to live their faith! In such a situation, it is easy to push the oppression and injustice meted out to others away from our con-

sciousness. "I am not my brother's keeper!" is as old as mankind. But it is contrary to our Christian responsibility.

During the World War II, Pastor Nimeral, one of the victims of the Nazis, stated:

"First the Nazis came down upon the Jews. I did not speak then, because I was not a Jew.

Then they came down upon the Communists. I did not speak then, because I was not a Communist.

Thereafter they had come down upon the Trade Unionists, then also I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist. Finally, when they came down upon me, I found I had nobody to speak for me."

## Section 2 : The Present Indian Situation in the International Scene

Questions for analysis :

1. Where does India stand in relation to other countries with regard to her Gross National Product, her population, health services, wealth and land distribution, etc.?
2. What is the general trend of trade relations between industrialised countries and India?
3. How do international financial bodies like the World Bank, IMF, etc., function with regard to India?
4. What is the role of Multinationals in India?
5. Are the proportions of profit, cost of labour, and availability of raw materials more advantageous to the Multinationals if they were to function in the industrialised countries or in India?
6. In what ways do the industrialised countries bring pressure to bear on the social, economic and political systems in India?

The group will discuss these questions and then work together on a summary statement on the Present Situation of India in the international scene.

### The Present Indian Situation in the International Scene

The past five decades after the Second World War have seen vast changes in all countries, especially in what is now generally known as the Third World. Many of these countries had attained their independence from colonial domination shortly after the war. India was one of these, having become independent from the British on August 15th, 1947.

Since independence, there has been a general progress in India's economy, literacy, education and industrialisation. Better amenities and more consumer goods are now available to her large population. However, a perceptive view of the situation prevailing in our country poses many disturbing questions to anyone who is involved in development work. This previous decade of the eighties has seen a sharp increase in communal division and violence, the most outstanding of which is the carnage of the Sikhs in Delhi after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. This was preceded by the Bhopal Gas disaster, with its consequent unjust and shabby treatment of the thousands of victims of the disaster.



Terrorism has increased because of the shameful neglect by the Government in the past decade of the situation of those who have felt themselves treated with injustice and oppression. We have had many instances of the callous indifference of the Government to the protracted struggle of the fishermen especially in Kerala. We have witnessed its ruthlessness in the slum evictions, in the silencing of human and civil liberties movements. We notice this indifference to the caste wars that are springing up all over the country, picking out the Dalits or Harijans as the easiest victims.

India has a low GNP, though it is high when compared to most Asian countries. It has the second largest population in the world. It has an insufficient health care system and poor health. While it is rich in natural resources, it is full of poor people.

After the Second World War, there has been a tremendous economic pressure on the developing countries by the West. This was effected not only to promote the economic interests of the Western world, but also to enhance its political strength in these countries. It is significant that the wealth of nations has gradually moved, and still continues to move from the poor nations to the rich countries. Whereas a century ago, the poor countries had 62 per cent of the world's wealth, while the rich countries possessed only 38 per cent, today the industrialised countries own more than 87 per cent of the world's wealth, leaving just a small margin to the underdeveloped country.

The results of the colonial system still prevails in India, and through the education system and the bureaucracy the colonial rulers had fostered, they have created a class of indigenous rich and powerful people who continue their domination by exploiting the vast majority of the country's population to a still greater degree than the colonials had done.

A new form of exploitative colonialism has taken over in the form of Multinationals. They set up their factories and production units in this country in order to take advantage of the cheap labour in India so that they can increase the profits they take back to their own countries. They impose their products on our country and shift the pattern of production from essential commodities to luxury items. These multinationals have strengthened their position in India and other third world countries, and

are regularly taking out more foreign exchange than they have brought in through the import of capital, loans or exports.

A disastrous profit-oriented business of multinationals in the developing countries is in the production and sale of medical drugs. There are strict environment and health controls in the West. This is good for the Western countries, but it may be helping to endanger lives in the Third World. Banning the sale of a drug or pesticide harms the profit of a western multinational. Sometimes, the company cuts its losses, and 'dumps' the dangerous product in the Third World, where there are few controls, or no controls at all. Each year, shiploads of defective medical devices, lethal drugs, known carcinogens, toxic pesticides, contaminated foods and other products found unfit for consumption in the West are exported and sold to Third World nations. This dumping is, in fact, big business. It involves manufacturers, retailers, export brokers, black marketeers and middlemen who traffic in the U.S. alone, an estimated \$1.2 billion worth of unsafe goods overseas every year.

The rich nations dominate international politics. The United Nations Organisation and all its allied organisations are practically under their control. So also they dominate international financial organisations like the World Bank and the IMF. As to the aid they give the developing countries, we must realise that it is not genuine aid, but has several strings attached so that the major beneficiary of these programmes is more the donor country than the receiving one! The conditions attached to the gifts and loans given by the International Finance Organisations are more harsh and demanding than those of the local village moneylenders, and the upshot of every borrowing transaction is that the receiving country gets more harnessed to the progress of the donor country.

### Section 3. Economic Structure of India

#### Questions for Analysis :

1. What are the goods and services produced in your area?
    - agricultural products
    - manufactured goods
    - products of cottage industries
    - marine products
    - others
  2. What are the means of production used?
    - land, raw materials for manufacturing (what raw materials?)
    - farm implements (tools and equipment)
    - farm animals
    - machinery for manufacturing and cottage industries
    - others
  3. Who owns these means of production? Are they owned privately or collectively?
  4. What proportion is produced for local consumption and what proportion for export - within the country or abroad?
  5. Is the emphasis more on consumption crops or cash crops?
  6. What is the relationship of the owners to the producer in the rural area? in the urban area?
  7. Who decides the distribution pattern? Who control the distribution centres - allocate supplies, fix prices,...?
  8. What is the role of the middlemen?
  9. What is the type of market we have in India : free, civic controlled or fully controlled? What is its role? Its effect on the owner? on the producer?
  10. Does the economic initiative come from outside or from within the area? Is the stimulus external and foreign or is it internal and national?
- The group will make a summary statement of the Economic System on the basis of their answers to these questions.

#### The Economic System in India

When we look at the economic situation prevailing in India, we are struck by its stark inequity. Power and wealth are concentrated in the hands of a few. Ultimately, the economic policy adopted by the Indian Government only serves to promote the exploitative vested interests of



a few who are both the monopoly capitalists and the multinationals. It is becoming increasingly clear that Indian industry is firmly set on the capitalist path. While to a great extent India has moved away from feudalism, there is a strong feudal element persisting with a capitalistic trend which is permeating Indian society. This admixture is far more brutal and dehumanising than feudalism itself, for it has blended the worst traits of feudalism and capitalism, without retaining the benevolence of the feudal lord.

### 1. Pressure of the First World on India

In the industrial sector, a small elite owning most of the country's assets are in alliance with foreign capital. In the recent years there has been a striking trend towards the liberalisation of licensing policies, reduction in corporate taxes with the definite intention of wooing the powerful upper class and the burgeoning middle class, liberalisation of imports, introduction of capital-intensive technology and a parallel opening to international financing through the IMF and the World Bank. These and other similar international bodies have, in a way, been responsible for much of the present crisis in India, in spite of its autonomous policies.

In the final analysis, these measures further promote the exploitative vested interests of both the monopoly capitalists and the transnational corporations. This major opening of India to economic, financial and technological penetration by multinationals has raised a situation of total economic asphyxiation and paralysis in the financial realm from which there seems to be no getting away. Thus, relations of exchange rates, with freezing or real depression of prices of basic commodities and products which India exports, together with the increasing prices of manufactured products and services from industrialised countries, higher interest rates, uncontrollable inflation, - all these cause the present economic crisis prevailing in India.

### 2. The Gap between the Rich and Poor

There is a very obvious gap between the few rich and the majority in our country who are poor. The distinction is also noticed in the discrimination between the urban and the rural areas, where most of the poor Indians live. The distribution of amenities and services is very discriminatory against the rural areas.

Only twenty per cent of the doctors of the country serve the villages where eighty per cent of our people live. Housing is practically ignored when it comes to rural areas, as also is sanitation and hygiene. Most of the landless labourers are underemployed and underpaid. Many of them are bonded labourers, slaving to pay back a small debt they might have taken years ago. There is a high level of unemployment in our country. Education caters mainly to the elite, while nearly 70 per cent of our people are illiterate.

In the rural areas the top 20 per cent own 96 per cent of the land, while the bottom 50 per cent own only four per cent. In the urban areas, the top 10 per cent own 57 per cent of property while the bottom 90 per cent own only 10 per cent. In Indian society, the top 10 per cent enjoy a third of the yearly income of the nation. The bottom 50 per cent are left with less than a third of this yearly income.

### 3. The Economic System

The economy of our country is dominated by a few powerful rich people who decide what has to be produced, where it must be produced, and for whom it is produced. They determine the market and the distribution centres, as well as the prices of all products. There is a sharp trend away from subsistence crops, and a move towards cash crops since cash crops require less labour and can yield faster and greater profits. The poor, without any bargaining power, are incapable of buying the basic essentials of life, because of the steadily growing price rise.

The trend in our country seems to be towards a capital-intensive industry rather than a labour-intensive one which would have opened up many more avenues for labour and employment. But the greed for an excessive profit on the part of the industrialists has been stronger than the concern of those in power for the masses living below the poverty line in unemployment, hunger and misery. The vast mass of this population has no bargaining power and is condemned to a sub-human condition of living, not only on the economic level, but also on the social, political and cultural levels.

The national productive structure of India seems oriented to export, neglecting internal trade and needs. Besides, this productive structure has excessively fostered some orientations that are not necessary for national development. These function to the detriment of the production

of fundamental goods for people's consumption and the development of national industry. India is therefore obliged to acquire many essential goods through foreign trade.

Obviously, this causes an indiscriminate transfer of capital and brings about an increase in products that do not help the country's population but rather places a greater emphasis on luxury goods, tourism, etc. There is no doubt that all this will result in further unemployment, marginalisation of the weaker sections, greater exploitation of women and children, of the people of the lowest caste or dalits and tribals who are the aborigines of the land, environmental pollution and the destruction of forests, the wastage and permanent pollution of water, the erosion of land and the destruction of fish and animals. (cf. "The Emerging Church of the Poor" - Statement released by the National Conference of Christian Political Activists, Social Scientists, and Theologians, at the Retreat House, Dhyana Ashram, Madras on January 2-4, 1986, pp.4-6.)

In spite of the vast poverty prevalent in our country, those who are powerful want to create an image of progress and often manifest their distorted priorities. The Asiad of 1982 was a very typical example of this. While Indira Gandhi stated, "The Asian Games are the pride of the nation", a construction worker at the Asiad stadium, was quoted by a newspaper : "At least 800 labourers have died working on the huge columns supporting the stadium. None of us were allowed to go near the bodies. They were promptly taken away in vans and never seen again".

More than Rs. 800 crores were spent on the games, 21,000 tonnes of cement, 6,700 tonnes of steel bars, 1,000 tonnes of structural steel and Rs. 1.5 crore worth of cables for lighting. A Swiss magazine reported: "This is a five-star culture in the making, which is not only out of touch with the masses of the Indian population but is also tying up capital and other not-so-plentiful resources such as cement and steel."

This may seem an exaggeratedly sad picture to those who are shown by the international media a picture of India as a fast developing country. It might appear to lay very much of the blame of India's present underdeveloped situation at the door of the Western countries, but an objective study of the present economic system will show that the stunting of India's growth is very much due to the economic and financial policies of the countries that are looked on as the benefactors of its development. These are aided and abetted by the national elite who



continue, to a worse degree, the exploitative policies of our previous foreign rulers.

#### 4. Ecology.

Everyone is aware of the severe crisis that exists with regard to the ecological deterioration that has been caused by the reckless use and abuse of the gifts of nature. The forests are being denuded, the rivers, lakes, seas and oceans polluted, the atmosphere is being thickened up rapidly with carbon dioxide and other dangerous materials that are destroying the ozone layer, the earth is polluted and eroded. Besides there have arisen several problems like the very low ground water table, which is being rapidly depleted by industries and the capitalisation of agriculture, the waste of rain water, drought, floods because of silting of rivers, which in turn is caused by deforestation and the consequent soil erosion, fuel deficiency, soil erosion, scarcity of drinking water. All these are found not only at the macro-level but also at the micro-level.

The causes for this ecological deterioration are the over-exploitation of water and forests, unscientific traditional practices like the use of cowdung for fuel instead of manure, the over use of wood as fuel, over-use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, which contaminate the ground water, use of hybrid varieties that require chemical fertilisers and pesticides, lack of infrastructure, undue commercial felling of forests, no maintenance of water storage, mechanisation and modernisation and, in general, mismanagement of the whole ecosystem.

It is urgent that awareness programmes on the widespread ecological destruction that is increasing day by day, be conducted on a "war footing". The people have to be organised to fight against the causes of ecological destruction. Efforts must be made by the people to stop deforestation, they must also organise themselves to desilt lakes, tanks and rivers, to do the required land levelling and take up genuine social forestry. They must be educated to scientific agricultural practices, like the use of sprinkler, etc. All this demands training of the personnel of voluntary agencies and of the Government. The strained relations between Government and voluntary agencies must be healed so that both can work together to bring about this awareness and organisation of the people with regard to the ecology.

So far, the Government has not shown that it has any political will to do something about this critical ecological situation. In fact, in collusion with the industrialists, it is one of the major perpetrators of ecological destruction and will join hands with them even to prevent any Government official or minister from firmly trying to halt environmental damage. Its programmes are not adequately planned and it does not seem that they really can benefit the majority of our people, namely the poor. There is a feeling, which is quite objective, that nothing much is being done about the ecology, because the Government, as well as we together with the people, are not convinced about the urgency of the problem.

Land reform is an essential feature for the real effectiveness of an ecological renewal. Once people have their own place, they will plant trees, take care of the water, soil, etc. Until that comes about, there is need of a critical awareness among the people about the ecological imbalance. We have to inculcate ecological values among the people so that they work effectively to the regeneration of forests and water sources. However, ecology is not seen by the people as yet to be one of their problems. Hence our strategy should be to take up their problem of fuel or drinking water scarcity, and move on from these till we arrive at the very root of the ecological problem. We must remember that neither the Government, because it has its vested interests, nor the voluntary agencies, who have no power, can bring about a change in the ecology. Change in this area must ultimately come from the people!

It is important that there be a continuous education programme, covering all sections of the population, even school children. In fact, ecology should become part of our education processes to all kinds of groups : sanghams, women's mandals, youth groups, etc.

## Section 4 :India's Social Situation

### Questions for Analysis:

1. How strong is the caste system in your state? What is the rough percentage of the lower castes or Dalits? Are they involved in economic and political decision-making? To what extent?
2. Is there any relation between caste and economic class?
3. What is the situation of women in your state - in the lower section of society? in the upper section of society? Has it improved during the past decades or is it still the same as before?
4. What do you know about the tribals in our country? How are they being discriminated against? "There is a systematic deliberate policy of tribal genocide in India, similar to the efforts of aboriginal genocide in the United States, Brazil and other South American countries, Australia and New Zealand". What would be your comment on this statement made by an eminent Indian sociologist?
5. Is there any other form in which discrimination exists in your state?
6. What is the budget allocated for education? Of this, how much goes to primary education? What is the present situation of primary education in your state? There has been a gradual decline in the national budget for primary education and a gradual increase in it for higher education. What does this indicate about the policy of the Government to the poor in the rural areas?
7. What is the percentage of illiteracy in your state? of men? of women? Is anything EFFECTIVE being done to reduce illiteracy? What are these measures? By whom are they taken?
8. What is the proportion of drop-outs from school after the first year, after primary school, after secondary school, and after high school? What does this indicate with regard to the relevance and utility of education in our country?
9. Is adult education given any importance on paper? in practice? If in practice, how? by whom? with what results?
10. Is education linked up with production, agriculture, health care, political organisation, etc.?
11. What is the relationship of the educational system with the political, economic and social systems?

After discussing these questions, the group will make a summary statement on the Social System in India.



## A. Discrimination

There is a systematic discrimination in our Indian society against some groups which are kept in a subservient position because this serves the vested interests of the powerful elite.

### Dalits

The first of these groups is the Dalits. This Sanskrit word means "the broken ones" and the people who were traditionally known as untouchables or Harijans have assumed it to themselves.

The Dalits constitute about eighteen per cent of India's population and are the most oppressed among the oppressed in India, - culturally, socially, economically and politically. The large majority belong to the subjugated and exploited army of landless agricultural labourers, a great percentage of whom still live in bondage to their landlords. Most of them live in abject poverty in hamlets segregated from the caste people who live in the security of permanent houses with inherited wealth and properties. This segregation is seen in the cities e.g. in educational institutions in which Dalit hostels are set up as segregated units, and various other amenities "reserved" for Dalits in order to "preserve" them from contact with them.

More than forty years after the Constitution outlawed untouchability and caste discrimination, the Dalits are still ill-treated and exploited by their fellow countrymen. In recent years they have been gaining in awareness of their situation and in many areas are struggling to regain their God-given dignity. But as a reaction to this increased awareness, the higher castes, through fear of losing their power over them, are increasingly indulging in atrocities against them.

### Women

Women constitute a little more than fifty per cent of the population. But, most of them, even many belonging to the higher stratum of society, are being generally marginalised to the extent of becoming invisible and voiceless to a shameful degree. Women undergo a double discrimination specially if they are poor, since they are discriminated against as part of the society which is oppressed and exploited, and also as women, who have to be subservient at every stage of their lives to their menfolk. This

two-fold discrimination against women is due to the predominance patriarchy and, often enough, through its perpetuation by women themselves, in all societal processes in India.

There has been an upsurge of activity during the present times with regard to the liberation of women insofar as we now witness the rise of various women's movements. However, the exploitation of women still continues. Though we read daily in the newspapers about rape, harassment and molestation of women, dowry deaths, bride burnings, etc., no substantial measures are being taken to safeguard the prestige, or even the lives of women in society.

The very values prevalent in our society are not conducive to the rightful place of our women in society. Parents are always looking for the birth of sons, and feel careless, unconcerned or even hostile towards a daughter right from the moment of her birth. Her nutrition is neglected in favour of the proper care and feeding of her brothers. Her education is looked upon as useless, unless it is going to be an asset for the capturing of a well-to-do bridegroom. Female amniocentesis is a very clear and evil manifestation of the attitude of society to women.

What is worse is that these anti-feminist attitudes and values are propagated from generation to generation by women themselves, for the mothers are the primary carriers of the culture, values, attitudes and behaviour patterns of their children, both boys and girls.

As a result, the status of women in society is deplorable in all parts of India and among all strata of society. Participation of women in decision-making in social, economic and political processes is conspicuous by its absence. A few exceptions are not enough reason for people to feel satisfied that women are taking their rightful place in society. In general, women's access to resources such as health, food, education, leisure and technology are sorely limited.

### Tribals

Although tribals constitute about sixty million, which is about seven per cent of India's population, they are another group which is being systematically marginalised and exploited. Their very existence is threatened through various factors. Because of the giant hydro-electric projects meant to benefit the vested interests of the elite, the tribals are being ruthlessly evicted from their natural and traditional habitat which

are the forests. Consequently, they are labelled "criminals" because their traditional relation with the forests has been declared by law to be an illegal one!

Being thrown out of the forests, they are dispersed, thus losing their rich culture of communitarian sharing, simplicity of life-style, dignity of women as equal partners with men in society, their respect for nature and the environment, their cultural expressions in the way of songs, dances and legends.

Because they are now used only as unskilled labour, they will soon be seen as redundant in the process of industrialisation and automation, and therefore dispensable. Gradually, except for the tribal elite who have joined the mainstream, they will be treated as a burden. There is no future for them. The price of progress is their slow decay and death.

### Child Labour

The problem of child labour is spread all over the country. Children are mainly engaged in the making matches and fireworks in the large factories in Sivakasi and other places in Tamil Nadu, where their exploitation is carried on to unbelievable lengths, in the carpet making industries in the north, and in beedi rolling in many states. In the rural areas, they start from an early age tending cattle, collecting fuel, and later on working in the fields. In drought prone areas they have a heavy burden of toil imposed on them in order to keep the family on a survival level. They are also employed in the cities as attendant and cleaners in restaurants, in offices, and in rag-picking.

They are forced to work from the ages of five or six because of the poor and miserable situation in their homes. They have no hope of education, they develop anti-social habits and because of the surroundings of their work places and from their peer groups, are exposed to immorality and bad habits.

The cause of this tragic situation of so very many children in our country is the abject poverty of their families which forces them to see children as an extra means of increasing the family income. Ecological reasons for child labour are drought which necessitates the labour of as many hands in a family as possible. When quite young, children are bonded to landlords, and even to middle class families as domestic servants. Their parents are forced to take the step of getting their children



employed, but very often, they too err, in being irresponsible towards their children, and squandering their hard-earned income on drink and other evil vices. Children are not sent to school, because their parents quite justifiably, see the education they will get as absolutely irrelevant and only leading to future unemployment.

There is a lack of proper knowledge on the part of parents and even of social workers about child labour laws, which are constantly and deliberately infringed by the employers of these children. Political corruption at all levels of society causes people in authority not only to turn a blind eye to the exploitation of children, but also to become a willing accomplice to and beneficiary of this exploitation.

Some voluntary agencies are trying to create awareness among parents, and conduct non-formal education from a very early age to the children who work in the factories. There are some efforts to give skill-training to the children in order to provide them possibilities of alternative employment. Awareness building programmes are also conducted so that there can be better working conditions, linked up with health education and the providing of health facilities. As a result of these efforts, parents are realising the problems of their children. They are thinking of alternative employment opportunities for them. Legal aid is now being made use of in some programmes. Free schools have been started in some places, and these do provide some help and relief to the children.

But these efforts are few and far between. A greater and deeper awareness of the situation of working children should be acquired by all those involved in social transformation, whatever be the level and area of their work.

## **B. Education**

Education in our country is a handmaid of the prevailing system in which injustice is inherent. It caters primarily, and we may say, solely to the elite. It totally ignores the vast majority of the poor and exploited masses, especially in the rural areas. In the first place, it is totally irrelevant to these people, deriving its roots, its content and its methods from an alien culture and system.

Most of the primary schools in our villages are conducted in dilapidated, crowded buildings or in the open air. Many more are one

teacher schools, and still more have not got educational facilities, not even maps or blackboards. Absenteeism among villages teachers is more the rule than the exception.

Nearly 20 per cent of our children do not go to school at all. 50 per cent of those who go to school leave in the first standard itself, 60 per cent abandon it before the fifth standard when they are about eleven years old. 75 per cent drop out before the eighth standard.

The whole education system is geared towards preserving the present socio-economic system. It reproduces, legitimises and reinforces the values upon which the economic system is based. Hence it increases the spirit of competition, the hankering after prestige and individualism. Paulo Freire describes the system used in our schools as the banking system, because in it knowledge is deposited by the teacher in the minds of the students and they are required to regurgitate it in examinations, which are a test of whether they "know or not"! There is no question of the students thinking. The teacher thinks, decides and plans for them. They are only passive receptors, to be programmed in view of forthcoming tests and examinations.

The banking system of learning is still adopted rather than participation in the educational process. Success is measured by results in examinations rather than by the development of human faculties, creativity and character. How can such a system give birth to the values we need for a new society, which are concern, selflessness, a spirit of service, solidarity and a sense of community?

Finally, one of the dangerous by-products of the educational system's irrelevance is the alarming rise in unemployment. It is very significant that when a nationalised bank advertised for 100 posts of clerk-typists, it received 15,000 applications from graduates and post-graduates.

## Section 5 :The Political System in India

### Questions for Analysis :

1. What is the governmental set-up in your area? in your state? in the country? What public policies, decisions and programmes has it formulated and decided? (Describe the nature of these policies with regard to economic, social, political, educational, health spheres, and other spheres.)
2. What other public policies, decisions and programmes are being implemented in the area which were not formulated and decided by the local governmental set-up? What is the nature of these policies? Who decided these policies and programmes?
3. In what ways do the community members participate in the formulation of these policies?
4. Who implements these policies? What structures are involved in their implementation : are they groups, institutions or community members organisations?
5. Who runs the governmental set-up? From what social strata do these people come? What is their economic background?
6. Who benefits from the policies that are being implemented? How do they benefit? If there are any groups who suffer from these policies, who are they, i.e. from which social or economic strata do they come? How do they suffer from the policies?
7. Are there any organisations among the people in the community? What is the nature of these organisations : religious, economic, political, cultural, etc.? From what strata of society are the leaders and the mass members of these organisations? As a group, do these organisations have an effective role in the formulating of public policies and decisions in the area?
8. Who makes the laws? For whose benefit are they made? Give some examples to confirm your answer?
9. How are the laws enforced?
10. Does the Government take care of the long or short-term interests of the rich or of the long or short-term interests of the majority of the citizens, who are the poor?
11. Who really controls the Government? Who controls the army and the police? Is it really those who are elected to parliament or is it some business or commercial interests? Who controls the systems of educa-



tion, of health, the courts?

12. In what way, do you think, can the people gain more political power and ability to make decisions in their civic and political life?

After they have finished discussing these questions, the group will prepare a summary statement on the Political System in India.

### The Political System in India

It is very clear that the socio-economic condition is closely linked up with the political situation in India. The poor people of our country have no share in decision making in the civic or political spheres of India. They are seen merely as vote-banks, and are paid attention to by the politicians only when elections draw near!

The Westminster model which has been adopted in India as a legacy of colonialism seems ill-suited to the culture and social structure of our country. Hence it leads to misuse, corruption, nepotism and various other ills. Military force and police power are freely used in different parts of the country to assist those in power for furthering their own vested interests. The military and police are consequently seen by the people as their enemies to be feared and shunned., Their domination leads to unbelievable violations of basic human and civil rights.

The Church has, so far, laboured under the impression that it must keep away from politics. Consequently, it has utterly neglected the political maturing of our people. Most Christians do not seem to realise that to be neutral in politics is already taking a political stand - it indicates that they are satisfied with the political status quo, even though it be unjust!

The prevalent political culture in India is conducive to a rather efficient manipulation of the people and the eventual negation of their dignity. The principle of 'divide and rule' has been universally adhered to by the ruling class, especially the government that India has had since her Independence, to divide the working classes and the poor on political, caste, religious and communal lines.

This last decade has seen various strategies systematically adopted by the anti-people machinery. There has been a consistent attempt to control the thinking of the people through the blatant misuse of the media. The elections of 1989 and of the beginning of 1990 in Haryana

have seen rampant rigging and large scale booth capturing, even involving murder. At the same time there is a very noticeable attempt of the ruling classes to foster communalism coupled with religious fundamentalism. All these factors have led to the reduction of democracy to a farce and the appearance of an autocratic and fascist state.

It is very clear that the poor people of our country have no share in decision-making in the civic or political spheres of India. They are seen merely as vote-banks, and are given a very self-centred interest by the politicians on the eve of elections.

We have to bear in mind that 85% of our politicians come from an agricultural landlord class, with two-thirds of them owning more than ten acres each. The people have hardly any political power. Their political weakness and exploitation is enhanced by the fact that most of them are unorganised and cannot in any way mobilise themselves.

The marginalised and neglected people of India form the vast majority of our population and the administration takes advantage of them. 80% of the IAS, IFS and IPS come from the top ten per cent of Indian society, and are more interested in their own class. Planning is not oriented in practice to the masses of our poor and suffering people. There seems to be a hope of change since some really concerned persons have been inducted into the Planning Commission. But how long they will be there is indeed very much in question, given the instability of the government.

## Section 6. The Cultural System

### Questions for Analysis :

1. What do the mass media (i.e. radio, newspapers, magazines, cinema, TV, etc., that reach the people in the area) say to explain the prevailing social and economic conditions of the people? What are their slogans, explicit and implied messages for the people?
2. What do the teachers in schools and colleges and the textbooks say to explain the social and economic situation? What are the explicit and implied messages in the curriculum and in the main values that the students are absorbing through their education?
3. What do the Government agencies and officials say to explain this social and economic situation?
4. What do the Church and other religions say about the social situation of the people? What are the explicit and implied values and outlook through their sermons, seminars, publications, etc.?
5. Besides these, are there any other outlets through which the people can get an explanation or even justification of the present social order? What are these? e.g. folk media. Among these different cultural outlets, do they contradict each other's explanation or justification of the social order? In what ways? Which among them has exerted the most dominant influence in the formation of people's values and outlook? Which of them now exerts a dominant influence in forming the public opinion in the area?
6. What do the people themselves say about the prevailing social situation?
7. What do the people of the upper level of society say to explain the lower status of the other groups and how do they justify their dominant social position? What do the people of the middle class say to explain the status of those above them and that of those lower than them? What do the poor feel about the two classes above them, and how do they see their own position and the cause of this inferior economic and social status?

The group will prepare a summary statement on the Cultural System in India on the basis of their discussions on these questions.



## The Cultural System

The people of our country are prevented by the mass media from knowing the actual situation that prevails because of the silence maintained by most of these media about the real factors that make the situation what it is. Besides, for many years, there has been a consistent policy of disinformation, that is, a telling of half truths and distorting the real facts through the media, especially those controlled by the government.

The cinema does sometimes manifest the state of oppression that exists in some parts of our country, but generally, it shows the answer in a conversion or elimination of one individual, or a small group, and not in the eradication of the injustice that is inherent in the whole system.

Educational institutions and the textbooks that they use, are oriented primarily to the culture of the elite, and convey values and attitudes that reinforce the class and caste distinction among our people, though the content of their teaching might seem to stress the right human values and attitudes, in practice they put a premium on competition, rivalry, individualism, prestige and all the values that are anti-communitarian, and even anti-human!

We in India have had a long history of the Government promising "bread and circuses" to quieten the people in the lower strata of society, through various programmes like the twenty point programmes, the NAEP and other government rural development programmes. The "circuses" are provided by soap operas, sitcoms and religious epics on TV. However, any study made of the implementation of the rural development programmes shows that they are used to benefit the political parties and politicians, the rural elite and other vested interests, while the poor draw only enough benefits from these programmes, if at all, to keep them quiet.

Religion is used, as is education, to legitimise, reinforce, confirm and propagate the values that are needed to preserve the system. If any religious body or group were to protest or show an inclination to assert different values which would be deleterious to the autocratic attitudes of the powerful, it is harassed either subtly or through a direct persecution.

While the dominating culture in our country is a Hindu culture, with the onset of industrialisation which has come from the West, India is

passing through a serious erosion of its traditional values. The process of modernisation is indeed a necessary one, but it has been accompanied by an ideology which is very deleterious to the cultural heritage of our country. This ideology is depersonalising and concentrates on the increase of material production and progress, without taking into account the human aspects of society. Hence it destroys personal human relationships, emphasises efficiency and speedy production, rather than interpersonal dimensions and quality of personhood.

As a result of this modernisation ideology, what used to be collaboration has turned into rivalry; where there was solidarity in the community, we now find individualism; where there was respect for women, as managers of the home, and moulders of its values and attitudes, we now have a much stronger male domination than ever before in our history. Indian communities were traditionally known for a simplicity of life-style. Consumerism that has come as a vital part of the modernisation ideology, has totally destroyed that. The sense of service has given way to prestige-seeking. Creativity has been lost in the quest of mass-production and the assembly line. Unfortunately, though most of us recognise that even the poor in our country have adopted this value system, we cannot, and dare not try to change the prevalent values, because we ourselves have consciously or unconsciously absorbed these values ourselves.

Further, the traditional cultural expressions like dance, music, song, poetry and festivals have lost their meaning and spirit. They have become commercial commodities for entertainment mainly of the elite. They have been replaced by an alien culture from the West, with the deluging of its songs, dances, music and other forms of expressions.. This invasion of a foreign culture has further eroded all our traditional values.

Efforts are being made, however, by several groups, to instill a more human value system in our people through media with which they have been familiar for ages, that is the folk media of various different states, like the Therukootu in Tamil Nadu, the Guru Katha in Andhra, the Jathra in West Bengal, etc. A few development groups and individuals, with Gandhian and religious orientations, are also striving to bring about a cultural change through their identification and involvement with the people in their struggles against injustice and poverty.

## The Deterioration of the Value System

It is tragic that in the process of post-Independence progress, the traditional socio-cultural and spiritual values of this country have suffered a decay. In fact, the attempts at progress and development seem to have brought on more alienation, violence and class hatred. The dignity of the human person also seems to be totally disregarded. We, Indians, seem to have lost our age-old heritage of values, and are now banking on pseudo-values which are hurtling us to the death of our culture and the creation of a small powerful elite which dominates over the masses for its own socio-economic and political interests.

### A. Our Traditional Indian Values

The values of a civilisation or culture derive from the philosophy of that civilisation. The Indian philosophy of Advaita has had a great influence on the thinking and culture of India, and its impact holds to a great extent even till today. Advaitism is founded on the principle that all being is one, that non-duality is the ultimate truth. There is basically no individual self or soul (jiva), only the atman (all-soul) in which individuals may be temporarily delineated.

From this sense of oneness is derived the fundamental value of harmony. For his self-fulfillment, every person must maintain a harmony, a balance in his relationships with God, with the cosmos, inanimate and animate creation, with his fellow human beings and with himself. Every disorder, calamity or catastrophe is due to a person or a group of individuals or a society having disturbed this web of relationships. The relationship to God is basic, and is maintained by a fulfilling of what he sees as God's will for him. That the relation between man and the cosmos is taken seriously is seen by the concern expressed in seeking an auspicious moment for a major event in life at the right position of various celestial bodies. The relation between the human being and inanimate creation is seen in the traditional respect the traditional Indian has for the forests, the trees and all living creatures and for his 'Mother Earth'. He was convinced that storms, droughts and floods were the result of some imbalance created by men. He felt related to the whole universe. Hence the tremendous importance given to determining auspicious moments and to astrology for the elements of nature. The right relationship with living creatures is emphasised by the place animals have in our



various indigenous religious systems, and by the almost universal vegetarianism prevalent in India.

The family is considered a strength in itself. The individual is expected to maintain a constant relationship of love, service and respect for the family of which he is a member. This is the driving force for the joint family system. It is because of this that every occasion of a person's life from birth through puberty, adolescence and marriage to death are family events in which the whole family is fully involved. A person is never alone, not even when he is sick or in trouble. His family will accompany him and stay with him in hospital, police station or wherever. The individual constitutes a part of his family which is more important than him. Hence we see the readiness of people to sacrifice their individual interests for the sake of their family. Many are the instances of an elder brother or sister who, if their parents are deceased, will remain unmarried until he or she has settled their younger brothers and sisters in marriage.

#### **B. Western Values brought in with Colonialism**

While Indian traditional values are centred on the community, western culture which derived from the ancient Greek philosophy and European Christianity was centred on the value of the human person. The person was seen as a psychological reality who had some rights and integrity as well as duties. In the 16th century, the Protestant reformation proclaimed the individual conscience as the sole criterion of Christian duty. The understanding of the human person was deepened by a wide range of writers from the 17th century onwards.

This new understanding of man contributed to the emancipation from feudalism and to the growth of capitalism. Liberty became the main theme of this culture in the economic, social and political spheres. It implied a laissez-faire policy, meaning the absence of interference by the state.

It was this value system that the colonists brought to India. With the capitalist economy they set up here, all the inherent competitive and individualistic attitudes were well established among the Indians who came into direct or indirect contact with the European traders and rulers.

### C. Socialist Values

In the twentieth decade of this century, a number of our intellectuals had gone abroad for their studies. Many of them came back with Marxist and socialist ideas. Gradually their socialist thinking became strong enough to give rise to the communist party in India. With the political and economic ideology of Marxism, the values of capitalism were derided as "middle class bourgeois" values imposed mainly to keep the ruling elite in its position of power and prosperity. Primacy of place was given to equality. The individual was seen as secondary to the state.

### D. Decay of Values in India

At the time of independence, Mahatma Gandhi harked back to the traditional Indian values and dreamed of building a new India on their foundation. But he was an exception. All the intellectual elite had accepted the Western and socialist values as being the only ones on which a modern India could be constructed. This was mirrored in the Indian Constitution which begins, "We, the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Democratic Republic, and to secure to all its citizens : justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation". During the decade that followed independence, there was a spurt of enthusiasm to develop the country. Young people, especially, put in their utmost to make India a developed nation. Most of them did what they thought was needed at that time. Hence, many kilometres of roads were built and many amenities were provided to numerous villagers by large numbers of students and youth.

There was a striking enthusiasm among the Government officials at that time, many Gandhians being among them. They were not only concerned with economic development, but also with social development as well. They were concentrating on fighting caste and building unity in the villages. They, especially the Block Development Officers and technicians, like dairy, agricultural irrigation officers visited villages regularly and established personal contacts with the villagers, inculcating values of sharing, solidarity and a sense of community.

However, with the rising stress on industrialisation and agricultural capitalism, which culminated in the Green Revolution of the late '60s, the idea of working with the poor for their uplift lost importance. The grassroots people go disillusioned, and a lot of frustration and cynicism was engendered among young people. The elite jumped into the rat-race and readily absorbed all the pseudo-values of capitalism which were competition, rivalry, individualism, maximisation of profits, materialism, prestige and consumerism. It is clear that these pseudo-values are rooted in the desire for power over others, and for economic superiority which is the primary means to achieve this power.

All through this process, there was no real blending of the Indian, Western and socialist values, but a mere superficial collage, without any roots in any of them. The modern Indian educational process, by and large, ignored the traditional indigenous values. Neither did it provide a philosophical basis for the Western values of personhood, liberty or equality. Without a deep attitudinal underpinning, these values deteriorated into mere verbiage and the preamble to the Indian Constitution was reduced to a mythological document, with no practical relevance, though respect is paid to it in word and writing!

The educational system does not provide a solid basis for right human values. On the contrary, being a handmaid to the prevailing system in the country, it legitimises, reinforces and propagates the pseudo-values of competition, rivalry, individualism, prestige and the like. The family, too, caught up by the pressure for economic survival, cannot but accept these pseudo-values for its practical life. Parents do not teach and insist upon the traditional human values, but when confronted with corruption, favouritism and other anti-social practices, many of them see no way out except through bribery, cheating, etc. They thus present double standards to their children who easily throw off all that they were being taught. The ambiance in which they live also helps them reject 'old-fashioned, middle class, bourgeois values' and join in the rat-race. Advertisements in all the media, silently persuade them to join the treasure hunt of consumerism.

The result of all this is that today we have a general decay of values. Relationships which were so basic to Indian tradition have deteriorated. Man's relationship to God for many, irrespective of their religious affiliation, has lost a deep, personal dimension. It has degenerated into



legalism and ritualism. God has become for many merely a figure whom one turns to when in difficulty, or when one wants one's desire fulfilled. This is because of the institutionalisation of religion. A religious authority is vested in a few, who determine religious beliefs, rituals and practices. As with the educational system, religious institutions serve to legitimise, reinforce and propagate the values and ethos of the prevalent socio-economic and political system.

With the institutionalisation of religion, it has become a divisive force. This divisiveness is encouraged by the wrong interpretation of secularism prevailing in India, through which the state proposes to be favourable to all religions, instead of being totally detached and impartial to all religions. Hence all religious groups vie with one another for state benefits. If one gets what seems to be a benefit from the government, the others will try to get a similar advantage.

The relationship within self is also disregarded. The body is given more importance than matters spiritual. Consumerism has catered to the desire for ease, comfort and luxury, so that self-discipline and control are rather rare, especially among the urban elite!

The present ubiquitous trend towards the nuclear family carries with it a lot of positive elements. However, it has resulted in a breaking up of the unity of the larger family and a diminished concern for others outside one's immediate family. So too, the community has been broken up. Our villages today are not homogenous units (not that they ever were!) but are much more riddled with divisions than before, be the divisions political, economic, social, or religious. The only cohesion that seems to be growing up on a large scale is communalism. This has its roots in institutional religion which tends to divide peoples very sharply.

Communalism was given its first strong impetus with the Moghul invasion. With the strong pressure to conversion to Islam by the new rulers, the Hindus felt they could only make an effective stand against the invaders by holding together to their ancient beliefs and traditions. They became religious fundamentalists. Fundamentalism drives people of a certain religion to look antagonistically against what they think is a threat to their religion.

British colonialism was another factor which reinforced communalism. The British in order to retain their power, followed the

principle of 'divide and rule'. They encouraged by action, policy and legislation anything that might keep Hindus, Muslims and Christians not only apart, but at one another's throat. The religious groups, as a result, held and still hold each other at bay and look on each other with suspicion. All this has led to an insidious religious chauvinism and hatred, culminating in intermittent spurts of violence.

As is generally known, a good quality taken to the extreme is bad. Some of the traditional good values have been drawn out to excess, leading to a further deterioration of the value system. When the sense of family or community has become excessive, it has led to nepotism or favouritism. A person who has a good job or position is urged by his loyalty to his relatives and friends to see that his brother, nephew or fellow villager or community member can also get a good position. He will therefore use all his influence to that purpose, even if it means overriding the better merits of another candidate.

The urge to dominate and the loss of the sense of family have had their worst effect on women who are expected to be submissive from the cradle to the grave. Rape, dowry deaths and polygamy are expressions of this dehumanisation of women. The capitalist value system has also brought about a breakdown in the relationship with nature. While there is an excessive faith in astrology, there is paradoxically a disregard for nature on the whole. Respect for forests, living creatures and Mother Earth has given way to a thoughtless exploitation of natural resources, a pollution of atmosphere, water and soil, and a tragic indifference to the security and well-being of coming generations.

Human values are fast diminishing in the political field. The present state of Indian politics makes us look back to the quarter century before independence. In those days, from the early twenties to the early forties, nobody spoke or even thought of joining politics. One did not enter politics, rather, one entered public life. But independence became a watershed. With the transfer of power through India's gaining her freedom, the soldiers of liberty became contenders for the loaves and fishes available in the country. Public figures and statesmen were replaced by politicians. In the pre-independence era, several people put their skills, toil and courage to work and they earned esteem for the nation. In this modern phase, however, many people put their skills, toil, influence and audacity to work and earn a disproportionate share of our

country's wealth and power. While before independence, the share of jail-going was turned into an event of pride, after independence, it is the evasion of jail-going that has become an event to take pride in!

With the deterioration of values in politics, there is a concomitant deterioration of the value system prevalent in the judiciary and the police. Within these structures, a culture of corruption, communalism, casteism and violence flourishes.

This culture is thriving in every walk of life and is blatantly portrayed in the media. The television and films lay emphasis on sex and violence. Their advertisements objectivise women. A programme that is watched in nearly every household that has a TV set, namely Chitrahaar, or its Tamil version Oliyum Olliyum, and corresponding film song and dance programmes in all Indian languages, is replete with insinuating obscenity, insidiously demeaning to the concept of love and to women, making them little else than playthings. Plagiarism in films, music and other arts, is taken for granted, conveying an attitude to viewers that there is nothing wrong in copying or cashing in on the efforts and creativity of others. The advertisements displayed in newspapers, magazines, cinema and TV subtly, - and often not so subtly! - pressurise readers and viewers into the stream of consumerism, reinforcing all the false values of envy, competition, prestige and luxury.



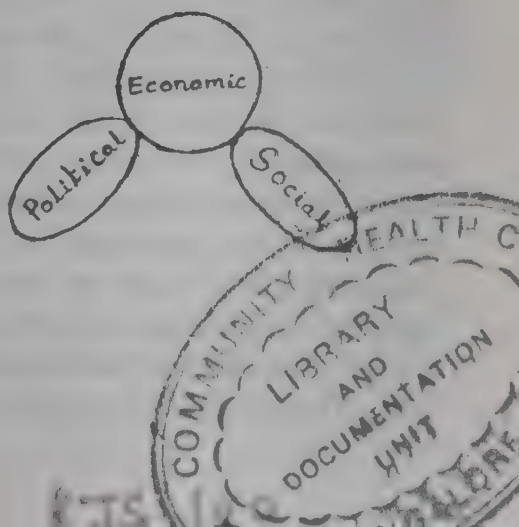
## Section 7 . Synthesis of the Whole System

After having made an analysis of the various sectors of the system, we now move to a synthesis of this analysis covering the various spheres of Indian society.

The economic strength of the country is vested in a few powerful people who determine the whole economic system. They are supported by a political group which they strive to bring to power by their financial support. Most parties represent the interests of the urban or rural capitalists. Parties may resort to rigging, bribery and populist programmes to gain maximum votes. Once a party obtains power, it can exploit the flaws in the system to maintain its hold. The groups that have political power are ultimately the ones who have economic power.

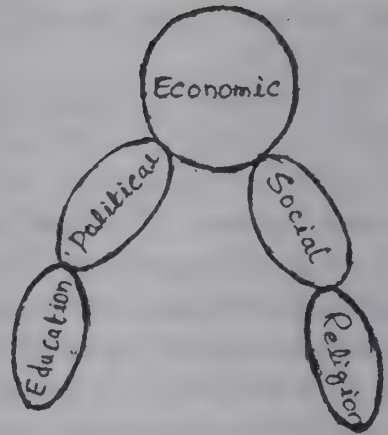


These economic and political forces are joined together and help one another to retain their power and social status. They ensure the division of various groups through social discrimination of people on the basis of birth, sex, origin and economic status. This principle of "divide and rule" is an important measure they put into practice to retain power.



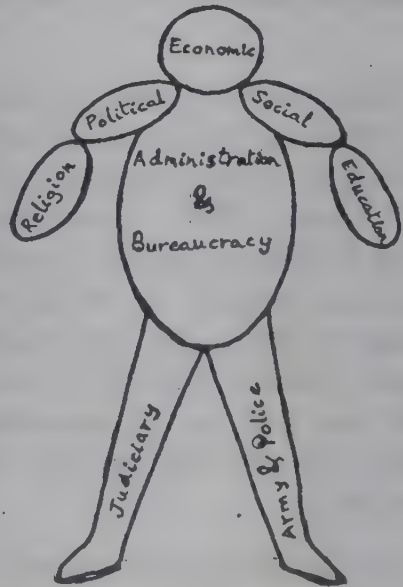
The significant thing about the division between rich and poor is not simply that the former have the resources to provide comfort for themselves and the latter cannot

have basic necessities. The reality and depth of the problem arises because the rich man has POWER over the lives of those who are poor. Even more important is it that the social and economic system, both nationally and internationally, supports the division between rich and poor and constantly increases it so that the rich get richer and more powerful, while the poor get relatively even poorer and less able to control their own lives.



We can then link to this structure two institutions which are used by it and oriented to the propagation, reinforcement and perpetuation of the value system that is needed to preserve the structure. These are education and religion.

In this exploitative socio-economic structure, the relationship between the dominant and the dominated groups needs an explanation and legitimisation. In the rural areas, a culture of fatalism, religious belief of a better life in the next world or next incarnation, paternalism, dependency, high premium on authority reigns predominantly. These values which receive a strong religious sanction, legitimise the positions of the dominant classes and are assimilated by the dominated classes who accept their lot as predetermined fate. These values may also be



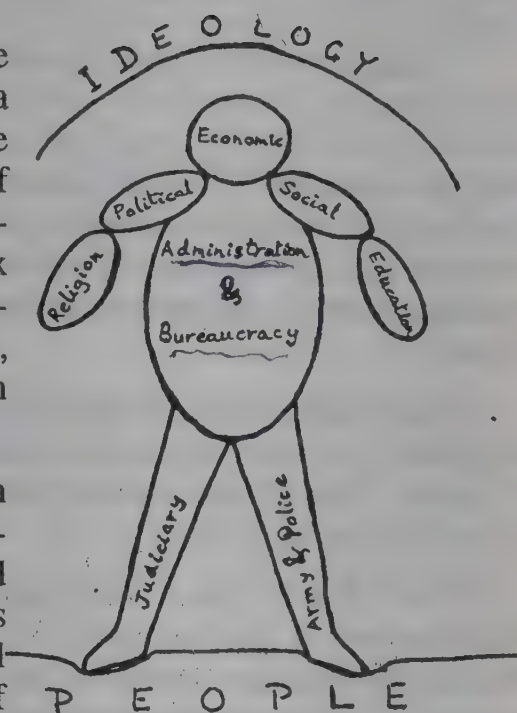
prevalent in the urban areas with an influx of the rural population.

The middle and upper-middle classes in the urban areas have a culture which is influenced by the present political system. Values of individualism, competition, profit-motive, and superiority complex permeate their lives. Thus their life-style - food, dress, entertainment, literature, art - alienate them from the masses.

Another instrument through which the ruling classes provide explanations, ideas and theories and values in support of their control is the education system. They control the teaching methods and content of the syllabus, so as to ensure that theories, ideas and values which challenge the present system do not appear in the open curriculum.

Because a specific type of education which reaffirms the current value system is essential for this task of preservation of the structure, no real transformation of the education system is possible. There will only be a few cosmetic changes to satisfy people that education is being made people-oriented. The religious institutions are expected to maintain the existing value system. If any religion were to put any obstacle to this or oppose the prevalent value system, it will be eliminated by various methods of persecution and harassment.

The main body through which these policies of the economic, political and social powers are implemented are the bureaucracy and the administration. Since most of the bureaucrats hail from the land-owning classes or rich urban classes, they cannot be expected to favour the poor as it would harm their interests and those of the decision-makers. It is no wonder that land reform acts fail to be implemented. Little wonder also that grants are cornered by the rural elite or industrial licenses grabbed





by the monopoly houses. We see this bureaucracy as a central section of the figure under the economic system.

Finally, in order to maintain its power and see that its policies are carried out, the system makes use of the two pillars of the judiciary on one side, and the army and police on the other. Under the present constitutional frame-work, the judiciary cannot be neutral. The constitution considers the right to property as a fundamental right. The police, army and other paramilitary forces are powerful arms of repression to quell agitations of the masses and preserve the interests of the ruling classes.

Thus, bureaucracy, the judiciary, the army and police, by selection and training, were not intended to, and do not wish to take independent decisions. They implement, interpret and enforce the decisions of the powerful decision-makers.

The whole system is overhung by an ideology of capitalism, of individualism, of free enterprise and the open market, of a sharp discrimination between owners and producers, employers and workers. Below the whole structure are the masses of the oppressed and exploited people.

It will be noticed that this figure looks like a man - yes, indeed, because it is like a living organism! You touch one aspect and the whole system is affected. If anyone tries to change one particular aspect, the whole reacts and prevents any change. If for example, someone attempts to change the education system, the whole system will rise to prevent this change, for it would imply a weakening of the whole structure. You may try to change the judiciary, but here again, the system which wants the judiciary exactly where it is and acting as it wants, will strongly obstruct any such change.

What then, is the only way to change this system in which injustice and disregard for the people is inherent? Here we must look for the weakest element of the structure that can be attacked. This is the ideology. We do not mean to say that we must fight aggressively against the ideology. Rather we must try to replace it with a new, more human and just one among the people. Hence, the only effective way to bring about a transformation of the system is through the education of the people and a change of ideology among them. And that they may be able

work towards this change, we have to enable them to organise themselves.

All the same, we have to admit that this figure has got internal contradictions as well as external elements that qualify its rigidity.

### Internal Contradictions

There are cracks in the system that we can use to help bring about transformation in it. For example, while we say the judiciary is rather committed, we do find striking examples of an unbiased judiciary. There are many judgments proceeding from it that are definitely oriented towards social justice.

We must also be open enough to realise that even within the system there are individuals who have the ideals of integrity and justice, who are in some way striving, within their limitations to bring about a change in the system. They may not be able to achieve much, but they are little islands in the system which can influence others, widening their circle of awareness and desire for a better society.

Among the poor and oppressed, too, there may be many groups, so far untouched by the deviations to development caused by foreign money and the operation of voluntary agencies who will be able to rise up and form their own movements for change. We have witnessed these in the total Revolution of Jayaprakash Narayan and the Chipko Movement of Sunderlal Bahuguna.

Part of our strategy should be to recognise these internal contradictions, and the power of spontaneous people's movements. We can then utilise the forces within the system or cooperate with them, as the case may be, and also join hands with these movements, without giving the impression that they can be more effective because of our help, but rather taking a fitting subsidiary role in the humility that really becomes us.

### External Influences

There are many things taking place in the world at large which are bound to have an impact on India. Take, for example, the events that have taken place and are still occurring in Eastern Europe. These are bound to have a repercussion on the CPI and CPM. Because of these events, the left ceases to be an option in terms of contradictions.

There is also a questioning growing in the West about its own values. There is a wide-spread questioning, for example, of consumerism. We do believe, and hope, that when so many are attacking the system at this point, there is bound to be some reaction and change. It is a system based and feeding itself on advertising and on the market. But at the same time, there is a universal and strong trend towards the Green movement, and a greater consciousness about the environment.

People are now demanding accountability. More of them are loudly questioning whether so much money should be spent on defence when the cost of a nuclear submarine is equal to the amount of money needed to provide drinking water to every village in the world. There is also an increasing realisation that tribals can teach us a lot about nature and its conservation. There is more search and study of tribal societies and their values which are more communitarian than those of the system prevailing in the world. There is a new thinking spreading all over the world, and societies are moving towards a more human, decent, accountable society that is environment-conscious. The very paradigm is now being questioned and even being undermined.

Hence the model of society as depicted is not as monolithic as it appears. It is being questioned through external and internal pressures which are both moving in a more humane direction. The rural areas have witnessed agitations by the agricultural labourers demanding payment at least of the prescribed minimum rates. Struggles are taking place all over the country for payment of higher wages, and protests against the corruption of the bureaucracy. These struggles are rather sporadic and isolated in nature, and are meeting with hostile opposition, brutal repression by hired goondas of the rural rich and the police. But they are the start of a new movement. For us, the time is ripe to take advantage of the rethinking about the poor that is taking place. The changes taking place in society at large are, without doubt, moving towards our direction.

But, these changes are not going to take place overnight. We must also realise that there will be a rearguard action from those in power. They are not going to give in to this change easily, for in the process they are bound to be the losers. We have to foresee their opposition and prepare ourselves and our people for it. Hence, once again, we have to stress the urgency and need of continuity of education and organisation of the people.



Here we can see what should be the attitude of any agencies, groups or individuals working in development. They must realise that the only strength that the poor people have in our country is their number. If only they were united together to demand their rights and the respect demanded by their human dignity, they would be able to get all their demands satisfied. But, by a multiplicity of development programmes, each isolated from the other, we who come from the upper levels of society to work for their development, have succeeded in dividing the people into several isolated groups and thus destroyed the only strength they possess.

By programmes that are oriented to relief, welfare and economic development of small groups through projects, we have succeeded in numbing the people to the real issue which is the injustice inherent in the system. These programmes are only cosmetic remedies that prolong the injustice and procrastinate the real movement of the people towards bringing about their own liberation. It would be more realistic and much more effective, if we intensified our programmes of education and organisation of our people. Once having become aware of their real situation and their own potential and limitations, and having organised themselves, they do not need anyone to work for their development. They can be the primary agents of their own liberation from oppression and exploitation.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. In this exploitative system, where do we as individuals, and as a group working together on this book, stand? Are we oppressors or part of the oppressed section of society? Or are we partly oppressors and oppressed? In what way?

2. What, therefore, should be our attitude towards the oppressive and exploitative system? In practice, given our own situation and place in society, what can each of us do? What can the group do?

3. "I am criticised often for my continual attack upon the rich. Yes : because the rich continually attack the poor." (St. John Chrysostom). Discuss this statement.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WHY IS THERE UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND OPPRESSION?

#### Section 1. Who needs Development?

When we talk of development, we are talking not about programmes, budget, money, plans, projects or institutions. We are talking about people. But, who are the people whose development we should be concerned about? There is no doubt that there are people who are in need of social and moral development, even though they are economically well off. But, if we have to start, it is important to begin with those who are deprived of the basic human needs like food, clothing and shelter. Hence, the people who stand immediately in need of development are the poor.

"If India is not to perish, we have to begin with the lowest rung of the ladder. If that was rotten, all work done at the top or at the intermediate rungs was bound ultimately to fail" (Mahatma Gandhi)

What is your image of the poor?

#### Group Exercise:

##### Procedure:

1. Each member of the group will list on a piece of paper five characteristics of slum or rural poor adults.
2. One participant will then tabulate on a big sheet of paper or on blackboard or flip chart these characteristics as called out by each one. They will be placed in three columns: Positive, Negative and In-between. Discussion can take place to ascertain in which column the group wants the characteristics to go.
3. Each member will then think about a particular poor person whom he or she knows fairly well. Five characteristics will be listed by each about this person.
4. Again they will be tabulated on a large sheet of paper or blackboard as before.
5. Compare the two lists.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Which list is more positive, which more negative? Why?
2. Are all the positive characteristics really positive? or the negative ones really negative? E.g. dependence, obedience, punctuality, respect, etc. are really positive? Why or why not? Self-determined, questioning, assertive, etc. - are these really negative? Why or why not?
3. Is the tabulation projecting the values of the group? In what way?
4. From where have we got our attitudes to the poor? - parents, peer groups, school, church....?



## Section 2. The Psychology of the Poor

Like every one else, the poor person, too, has an ideal, someone whom he or she considers to be the "human person" he or she would like to be. However, the concept that he or she has of a human person is that of the powerful person, who is looked up to, who is treated with respect and whose word is law. In other words, the ideal that the poor have internalised is the one whose life is totally different from their own, namely, the oppressor. Their ideal of a human being is not derived from human nature, but from the system in which they live.

Because the oppressed have internalised the oppressor, they aspire to be like their bosses, and therefore are attracted to the oppressor and his way of life. This is shown in their attempts to imitate him in his mannerisms, his peculiarities of dress and behaviour. Another way in which they imitate the oppressor is in becoming little oppressors themselves. Unable to repay the violence of the oppressor with violence, they give vent to their frustration through violence against those who are weaker than them : their wives, children or a weaker fellow oppressed. Oftentimes, this frustration drives them to drink.

At the same time, they have also internalised the myths which the oppressors have fabricated about them. Being constantly labelled "lazy, good for nothing, stupid, etc." they accept that they really are what they are called. They distrust themselves. They are emotionally dependent on him. For the poor and oppressed, to be is to be under the oppressor, dependent on him.

For most of the poor, development generally means the reversing of roles, in which they are the bosses and "the mighty are put down". Besides, because of their long struggle for survival in a world where "each man is for himself", the poor and oppressed are individualistic and see development only as individual, not community development.

Most poor people in India are viewed by the middle and upper classes as being apathetic, but very few of those who hold this view will concede that this is predictable, given that poverty and malnutrition will have already wreaked their havoc and stunted the mental and physical development of children before they reach the age of five years. Many of us see the poor as being fatalistic and resigned to their lot in life. But

we must also realise that some of the major religions of India, and of the world, for that matter, encourage and promote docility and resignation. One of the consequences of such a limited understanding of the realities and circumstances of other human beings, is that those of the country's poor who are not apathetic and docile are automatically labelled as left-wing, communist and anti-religious.

However, today, many of the oppressed poor in our country are awakening to the reality that they are persons, that they have a right to live as autonomous, independent human beings, capable of reading and writing their own history. This is the starting point of a real social transformation. Adolfo Perez Esquivel (the winner of the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize) in his book "Christ in a Poncho" has this significant insight:

"We have a favourite idea, a kind of basic maxim: the first step towards liberation, we say, occurs when a human being becomes aware that he or she is a person. Far from being content with being mere objects, from being anonymous cogs in the wheel and numbers to be manipulated (and increasingly even eliminated), significant numbers of poor people are becoming aware of their personhood. They are discovering themselves as persons, they are discovering their dignity, and are recognising themselves as being in the image of God. Poor communities are asking questions of themselves; they are analysing their predicament and are learning to listen; they are acquiring a grasp of their political and economic situation. All this, together with discovering a God with whom they can genuinely identify, and contact with other similar groups who stand with them in solidarity, has produced this new awareness, this new awakening, and we might say, this resurrection.

"I believe that in the waking up and in the rising up of the poor and their communities to self-hood, we are witnessing a new and telling experience of the resurrection. The waking up and the up-rising of people which, like the resurrection of Christ, is initiated by God, is a reality. It has in many ways become a movement. Can we not say that this awakening and up-rising is indeed a movement of the Holy Spirit?"

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the economic, social, cultural and religious factors that determine the psychology of the poor?
2. How would you answer a person who tells you that people are poor because they are lazy, and have no "push" or initiative? And what reply would you have for one who says that poverty and riches are all a matter of fate?
3. The words of Christ "The poor you will always have with you" have been often quoted by people to serve their own purposes. Do you think it should be interpreted as the poor will always be there for you to use as the means to gain your merit or salvation or that there will always be poor people as long as there is sin in the world, because sin is always linked up with injustice?



### Section 3. Ways of Understanding Poverty

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. Have you ever experienced real poverty?
2. Besides the absence of basic human necessities, the poor man suffers a continual insecurity. In what way does this insecurity add to the pangs of poverty?
3. How would you define poverty?

When the discussion is over, the group could read the following passage to see the different ways of understanding poverty and the consequent ways of dealing with it.

I. The first way of understanding poverty derives from a static way of looking at society. Poverty is seen as a result of fate, or as a punishment for the misdeeds of a previous birth. It is God's will, as seems indicated by an old hymn :

"The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
The Lord has created both of them  
And placed them in their state."

This group sees poverty as part of our normal human existence, "The poor you will have always with you", as taken out of the context in which Jesus made this statement. People who look at poverty in this context see that it is distressing but unavoidable. Riches are looked on as a blessing of God, and a challenge to their possessors to share. At the same time, they take comfort in the beatitude which says "Blessed are the poor"!

Their answer to poverty is to try to alleviate the suffering of the poor through charitable work, through which they will gain eternal reward, so that they see the poor as the raw material of their own salvation! They firmly believe that if there is a conversion of heart among the poor, their situation will change. This leads them to launch relief programmes in a spontaneous reaction to poverty without identifying the cause of poverty. Their approach is that of not giving a man a fish but teaching him how to fish. But they do not realise that the nets with which he fishes belongs to the rich who drain him of the profits he makes by his labour.

The attitude of people who understand poverty thus is that of paternalism towards the poor and in reciprocation, it creates a sense of dependence in the latter. They would hesitate to question the current authority. Rather, they inculcate in themselves and the people they help, a spirit of obedience to authority and the attitudes of submission and passivity to the present situation, for they hold stability as a value to be cherished above all.

II. The second approach to poverty is to lay the blame for it on the backwardness of the country and its people. "The country is a hundred years behind those in the West" is what we often hear them say.

Consequently, they understand development as a process of modernisation of the people through education and technology. Because they believe that the benefits of modernisation will "trickle down" to the poor, they opt for the raising of the Gross National Product (the GNP) and for an increase in the import of capital and technology from the more developed countries.

Their approach to development is through projects. Through these, they strive to replace mud huts by brick and cement buildings, to replace the traditional arts and crafts by machine-made products in industry, the indigenous medicine and health practices by Western medical systems, etc. In order that the people, even in the rural areas, may absorb this orientation and the values underlying it, they strive to get the Western and city-oriented education system introduced in the villages of India.

In running their projects for the poor whom, like the previous group, they also often think of as "beneficiaries", they are good managers, efficient in dealing with the people and with government officials. They believe in "getting things done"! The values underlying their approach are the spirit of hard work and discipline. They aim at helping the people, but not changing the world and society, which is rooted in a stark injustice and inequity. They would like to render service to the poor, but without creating any conflict with the powerful in society. Their analysis is not strong enough to see that these powerful elite hold the root of the poverty and misery of the masses of the Indian population.

III. The last group holds that poverty is the result of conditions that have been historically created by the alliance of the economically powerful with the political forces of the country. Poverty is caused by injustice,

by the inhumanity of man to man, and is more realistically defined as the depriving by the few of the basic human necessities of the masses of the poor. This injustice is inherent in the system itself, because of which the people's rights are consistently violated.

This group believes that the remedy to the situation of the poor at the grassroots is not just a reformist movement to let the prevailing situation be run better and more efficiently, but that there must be a radical transformation of the socio-economic and political structures in society. Hence the poor have to be initiated into demanding their God-given human rights, first of all, through a process of education. This education must help the people to make an in-depth analysis of the structures that dominate in our society. It must clarify their ideology or vision of society and help the people to organise themselves in a strong united body, so that they, since they constitute the majority of Indian society, will be the primary agents to build up a new just, participatory and sustainable society. When the community has been organised, it must take up the issues that confront it. This organisation must culminate in a people's movement with a national perspective, leading to political action to bring about a new society.

The life style of this third group and its relationships with the poor are rooted in equality, a practical belief in people's participation in their own development as its primary agents, with them solely as catalysts. Hence, instead of teaching and ordering people about, they believe in dialogue with the oppressed. Their emphasis is on a message which is prophetic and liberating, with a focus not on institutions but on people.

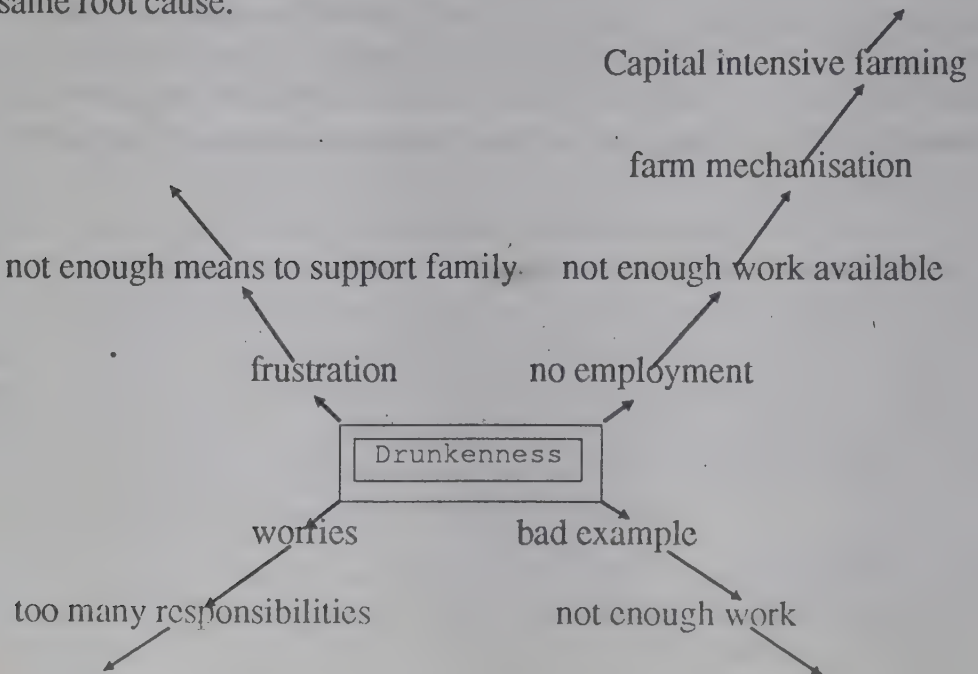


## Section 4. The Root Cause of Underdevelopment

### Exercise of a Web Chart

The group can try an exercise to find out what is the root cause of the under-development and oppression in our society.

- It will break itself into pairs, each with a large sheet of paper, at least of foolscap size.
- In the centre of the page, each pair will write one of the problems that are encountered in society, especially among the poor. These can be illiteracy, unemployment, drunkenness, etc.
- Around this problem they will list the immediate causes of this problem.
- They will then identify a few deeper causes for each of these causes, drawing outward lines of connecting arrows.
- Each strand of the web will be prolonged till the last item of all the strands is the same. This will be the root cause of the problem they selected.
- When all the pairs have finished, the whole group comes together and makes a comparison of all the webs done by the various pairs. If done seriously and with a determination to identify the fundamental source of underdevelopment, this exercise will show that all the problems have the same root cause.



There may be some pairs who stop with fatalism, ignorance, poverty, or some other intermediate cause. The whole group will then question the roots of these, till each web has at the end of each strand the same root cause.

It will be realised that the root cause of under-development is not poverty, fatalism or illiteracy, or even hunger for power over others. All these stem from injustice. From the result of the exercise of all the pairs, if they have studiously applied themselves to the task, it will be very evident, therefore, that the fundamental cause of India's under-development and of the misery and poverty of so many of her millions is an injustice that is inherent in the very system. Any effort towards development, therefore, ought to move not merely to remove poverty, which is just a symptom, but to hit at the root cause which is this injustice. This injustice is closely allied with selfishness or self-centredness.

### The Spiritual Root Cause of Under-development and Oppression

A socio-economic political and cultural analysis of the system is very revealing. It shows us that the root cause of all oppression and under-development is the injustice inherent in the system. But to understand the full dimensions of this injustice in society, it is important that we make a Christian and spiritual analysis. The sins of greed, selfishness, hatred, injustice, corruption in the hearts of men, and embodied in oppressive structures, find their roots and tenacity in the kingdom of darkness, the spiritual world of evil.

#### Ephesians 6:12

For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of the dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. Is it possible to bring about justice in this world only through a purely human struggle? Why or why not?
2. What is the guarantee that once we have succeeded in our struggle to bring about a just society, it will continue to remain in a permanent state of justice and equity?
3. Why is there need of a "spiritual combat" for social justice?
4. Could we say that the Kingdom which Christ came to establish on

earth, and which we pray for when we say "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" is the goal of this spiritual combat.

5. Discuss the following statement of Mahatma Gandhi : "Prayer, properly understood and applied, is the most potent instrument of action".

6. But prayer alone is not enough. What more can a committed Christian do, besides prayer? What are the various means, both socio-economic, political and cultural as well as spiritual that must be used to bring about the Kingdom that Christ came to establish?



## Section 5. Evolution of Development Approaches

### A. Development Policies before the Sixties

After the Second World War, many countries became independent and were members of the United Nations Organisation as autonomous members. During the early meetings of this august body in 1949, when the representatives of each of these countries unfolded the situations prevalent in their country, it came as a jolt to all present to realise that two-thirds of humanity were living in sub-human conditions. Everyone felt that something should be done about this.

Soon aid was pouring in from the developed countries into the under-developed countries of the Third World. How to use this money did not seem to be a problem, because a tradition of help from abroad was already established especially by the Christian missionaries who came from the West to work with people in poorer countries. While the primary responsibility of these missionaries was seen by them to be the spreading of the Good News of Christianity, they did very much to help the people with whom they work to live a more human life.

When the missionary movement started in India, the Church displayed a pioneering spirit. In the context of its evangelistic ministry, it made an analysis of the situation prevailing in the country and realised that it had to respond to the grave challenges of ignorance and disease. It therefore built up institutions to provide education and health services for the people, especially for the poorest who formed the majority of the rural population. Gradually, the worth of these institutions was universally recognised, and they were opened in the large cities and towns of India, where even till today, they have a wide influence and play an important role. The Government and other organisations which were concerned about the uplift of the millions of poor people in our country emulated the pioneering efforts of the Christian missionaries with regard to health and education.

### B. Development Policies in the Sixties

The Sixties were called the First Development Decade and they started with an overwhelming optimism and hope. It was generally felt that the transfer of capital and technical know-how which had revived Europe after the Second World War could now be extended to the Third

World and it would bring about a similar economic growth to the

- developing countries. The development stress in our country was along these lines, and a heavy emphasis was placed on industrialisation and technological expertise. Development programmes were oriented to self-employment schemes and rural development through agriculture and agro-based industries.

Carried on by this wave of optimism, the Church in India felt that its contribution lay in the increase of educational and health institutions. The Church leaders believed that these institutions were the best mode of serving the country and of bearing witness to Christ's message. Western standards were taken as the norm for Christian schools, colleges and hospitals, and it was hoped that with greater literacy and education and the improvement of health, there would follow the introduction of sophisticated technology, resulting in economic growth, greater employment and social change geared to an industrial revolution.

It is also evident that the minority status of the Church in India gave cause for a sense of inferiority and insecurity in the national atmosphere of newly gained independence. The church felt that she would not have the same privileged status she enjoyed in the time of the British. This feeling was, to some extent, responsible for the proliferation of the Church's educational and health institutions.

Besides these institutions, the Church had also launched out on diverse charitable activities, which were impelled by a deep Christian sympathy and compassion and obedience to the injunction of Christ to find him in the hungry, thirsty, sick, etc. These activities were, by and large, welfare-oriented, and were made possible in those years when there was a relatively large number of foreign personnel who could get somewhat large donations from abroad. Their indigenous counterparts, who did not have such contacts, got their financial aid from foreign funding agencies which gave donations for specific programmes, unlike the "free missionary gifts" that came for unspecified purposes.

Even in that period, there arose a certain amount of questioning and reflection among many people about the relevance of big institutions and of welfare-oriented activities to the real integrated development of people. Some also questioned the relationship between development and evangelisation. The priests felt the need of doing something to improve the economic well-being of their recent converts, most of whom came

from the marginalised poor. But they were not certain whether or not they should dissociate their social work from their evangelical duty. As a matter of fact, the debate still continues among clerical circles even today!

But, even while initiating economic programmes, many agencies, both religious and secular, who were running development projects, failed to break away from their charity and welfare-oriented mentality. As a matter of fact, in practically most Church organisations, development programmes became organised forms of doling out charity to which the recent converts had got accustomed, instead of becoming means of making the people self-sufficient. Some studies indicate that this has in fact continued the sense of dependence among the new Christians, and has even transferred it from the village headman, the money lender, the middle man and the landlord to the parish priest or the lay project holder.

Such dependence was caused not only by relief programmes. Even a well-organised project created or continued domination and dependence relationships, when the project holder acted as a middleman between the people and the foreign resource agency, and not as a catalytic agent to help the people develop themselves and bring about their own liberation from the many bondages that press down upon them.

### C. Policies of the Seventies

The various educational institutions in the country had produced a large number of educated people. Some of them had become aware of their role and responsibilities to their fellow citizens and they wanted to be involved in social work. From such people sprang up several groups, secular and religious, who initiated programmes for the community development of the poor, either with foreign help or with indigenous resources.

The concept of transfer of capital and technical know-how to bring economic growth to the developing countries, so popular in the sixties, had not succeed. In the seventies, a small number of groups in the country realised the dangers inherent to a purely technological, economic or paternalistic approach. This led to their re-thinking of their role in development. They believed that they had to pay greater attention to the human aspects of development and to the organisation of the people.



At that time, some foreign resource agencies began to insist on viable organisation with people's participation to run the projects and give them continuity. Hence, many organisations turned to initiating development projects as registered cooperatives. The cooperatives, however, did not prove to be a success in giving the people a more equitable share in the benefits, for rather than being cooperation among equals they turned out to be competition among unequals. The richer members derived far greater benefits than the poorer ones. This inequality was rooted in the very system.

However, another much smaller group of development workers asked more fundamental questions about the development process. Triggered off by various youth movements, both Christian, like the AICUP (All India Catholic University Federation) and SCM (Students Christian Movement) and non Christian, like the Gandhian, the sarvodaya groups and various leftist movements, many young people formed groups and reflected on the social work as it was being carried out and the impact which it had, or did not have, on the social structure.

As a result of their reflection, these groups realised that economic programmes were by themselves ineffective and that greater emphasis had to be given to the social and human factors. They realised that in order to bring about a real change in the lives and situations of the millions who live below the poverty line in our country, a deep structural analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural situation in our country is an essential foundation. They became convinced that in the Indian context, where the aim of development is the enabling of the people to take their own decisions in every sphere of their human life, development necessarily becomes political action. They saw their own role as sharers in the act of liberation from unjust structures. Concentrating on human resources, they used non-formal education and awareness building leading to people's organisation as the only mode of action.

#### **D. The Development Policies of the Eighties**

The eighties have brought a further evolution in the ideas and methods of some development groups. This evolution was caused by many factors, some of which were the changing situation in India, the interaction and dialogue that the groups have with one another working in the field of development and the insights they gain by sharing

concepts, approaches and methodologies with visiting foreign experts and resource agency representatives.

The majority of organisations who are sincerely striving for development of the Indian people realise that a piecemeal approach is no longer valid. Most groups had until then tried to tackle isolated problems and issues, such as economic backwardness, lack of education, ill-health, women's issues, the ecological, caste, communal, political or other problems. A few groups now felt it necessary to take an integral approach and make education, that is, awareness building, and people's organisation the main tool for bringing about a just, participatory and sustainable society. The economic factor, they realised, cannot be overlooked, but it must be taken as an entry point or as the basis for education and awareness building of the people.

A further step taken by these groups is the building up of networks or federations of many action groups. However, these federations run the danger of becoming closed cliques, or "middlemen's clubs" in which representatives of action groups meet from time to time to discuss developmental issues. They do not generally lead to the building up or strengthening of people's movements. Unfortunately, by and large, the Church organisations are generally very closed in on themselves. Neither do they join with other non-Catholic organisations, nor do they try to form any network or union of organisations. However, it is heartening to note that in the south, some Church groups are forming effective networks, and even working in collaboration with secular organisations for the building up of people's movements.

The latter part of the eighties has seen the rise of issue-based networks. Efforts are being made by groups to unite or collaborate on various specific issues. Groups that are working with fishermen are attempting to form networks, as are the groups working on women's issues, or on the ecological issue, on legal aid, human rights or on peace. It is hoped that the formation of such networks will consolidate the ideologies of the member groups and open up avenues for concerted actions and strategies, which will eventually give more effectiveness to the development process and the struggle for the liberation of people. Here again, unfortunately, with very few exceptions among the priests, the Church has not yet broken out of its cocoon, and generally keeps

away from any cooperation on initiatives taken by those outside the Church.

#### E. Deterioration of Voluntarism

It is tragic that many of the voluntary agencies have lost their pristine vision and therefore are being passively spun around in a whirlpool of activism. This has led to a depletion of motivation and a strengthening of institutionalism, where regulations, organisational structure, activity and success, no matter in what direction, have taken precedence over persons. The ones who suffer most from this are the personnel at the lower levels in the voluntary agency. Very often, they are victims of the injustice and inequality that the agency professes to work against with the poorest of the poor.

The cause of this situation is the reliance the agencies have on the financial resources that come from outside. Their personnel no longer feel the pinch of insecurity, they have secure jobs, with more than adequate salaries, they have managed to pick up quite a number of perks, linked up with their work, so that the equipment meant for the programmes are without any scruple monopolised by many of them, e.g. jeeps, vehicles, T.V. and video sets, cameras, etc.

The excess of funds that are poured out by the resource agencies are also, to a great extent, the cause for this deterioration and for the killing of the right motivation for social work. These agencies and their representatives, no matter how committed they may be to the cause of authentic development, are only transitory visitors, and it is impossible for them to really know the situation of a specific area or people for whom a programme is run. The ease with which they can be manipulated by those who know the right jargon and the tricks of the trade makes them easy victims of developmental skulduggery. This is confirmed by the number of times we have actually witnessed their rejection of programmes which are sincerely and authentically people oriented, small budgetted, and low image ones, simply because the project holders who contact them are too simple, honest and straightforward. They do not speak the right jargon, they have not got the skills of sycophancy or adulation when relating to outsiders. Hence they do not make much of an impact on them.



Money has a tremendously powerful role in the carving out of decisions. Not only the money of the resource agency, but also the money at hand with the voluntary agency can to a great extent determine the kind of programme which is run in a project. The people too, are influenced by the money that flows into a project. They might see their need in a different area, but if money is being offered for a particular purpose, they will put aside that need and avail of the benefits of this money. Thus the whole process of development and liberation is diverted by the flow of money.

The workers in an agency are also influenced by money. Questions predominant in their minds are "Who will look after my family if I rely solely on sincerity and commitment? I cannot work without pay. But if I am to be paid, from where will the money come?" These questions ultimately lead to the same direction : power is where the money is!

The result of all this is that genuine 'voluntarism' is practically dead in our country. The voluntary agencies have, by and large, forgotten what they are really trying to do. They are oblivious to the problem of lack of continuity, either when the man on top is changed, or when the funds stop coming from abroad. Neither are many of them concerned with moving from the micro-level to the macro-level. This is mainly because they have not developed a deep analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural systems prevailing in our country and which necessarily have a continuous and strong impact on anything effected on the micro-level. It is clear that what is needed is a deepening of motivation of those working for the liberation of the poor and exploited people in our country. Fresh blood is required in all the voluntary sector, so that new motivation, enthusiasm and new strategies can be effected. There should definitely be a very great reduction in the dependence of funds, especially those coming from abroad. Of course, a major part of the problem would be solved if the foreign resource agencies discovered their authentic place in the process of development, realised their own limitations and gave much more importance to the knowledge and experience of people actually in the field, and not just to their mediators, who work from behind desks in the capital and other major cities of India.

#### F. People's Movements : The Source of Hope

To summarise what has been said up till now, we find that in our country at present, there are four generations of social work co-existing

simultaneously, even among Church groups. These are :

1. Those run on a charity-basis, where the relationship is purely that of giver and receiver.
2. Those in which there is an element of community participation.
3. Those that have progressed further from this participation leading to local people becoming animators to their own people. Through these animators primarily a relationship is built between the agency and the people.
4. A people's movement, in which the people are actually the activists, that is, the primary agents of their own liberation.

It would be quite right to say that these four approaches flow from the different ways the agency people understand the problem which they intend to tackle through their work. If they see the problem as one of poverty, charity would be the approach called for. If it is a process of people working for their own development, they work for community participation. This is intensified towards local animators and people's movement insofar as the agency sees its own role as purely that of a catalyst aiding the people as and when they need its help in educating and organising them.

As to people's movements, many questions can be raised about whether they are really initiated by the voluntary agency. Many are the cases where a people's sangham is already existing before the agency takes over. The agency coopts it, and proclaims it especially to the donor agency as a sangham of its creation. In the process, it destroys its authenticity, and unfortunately, converts the sangham into a kind of executive branch that implements on its behalf what had been planned by the collusion of resource and voluntary agencies, without the involvement of the people themselves.

Hence, the underlying issue is: who really takes the real and vital decisions? - Is it the agencies, both funding and implementing, or the people? As it stands today, in most of the cases, the decisions are taken by the resource agencies and the project holder. Too often, the latter is subtly oriented to the decision of the donor agency, because he or she still has the eggshells of the traditional feudal value system adhering on, so that he or she becomes subservient to every desire, spoken or unspoken, by the representative of the foreign funding agency.

However, in the midst of such a dehumanising socio-economic and political situation and the far-spreading deviation among voluntary social work agencies from their pristine commitment to the people, we can still discover a ray of hope. The deep longing of the marginalised to be free, cannot be stifled for too long. We find that many of the neglected and oppressed poor have begun to mobilise their dormant power, assert their inalienable right to participate in decision-making processes and establish their legitimate role in the transformation of society. The widespread emergence of militant peasant and dalit (harijan) movements, tribal movements, civil right, women and youth movements, ecological movements, are clear indications of the rising consciousness of the grassroots people as relevant political forces.

These movements are viewed as threats to the designs of the ruling classes and their allied vested interests. They project these legitimate struggles as a law-and-order problem and as endangering national security. They enact laws to curb these movements. Directly or indirectly, the landlords and other powerful sectors, through their private armies and hordes of rowdies or goondas, unleash a reign of terror in the countryside and in the cities. The police frequently intrude into the civil life of the citizens, especially those who constitute the poorest section of society. All these efforts are designed at suppressing the genuine aspirations and legitimate dissent of the people.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. What was the vision of the human being that predominated in the development field in the fifties? in the sixties? in the seventies? and in the eighties?
2. In view of this evolution of development approaches, what would be your definition of development?
3. Study the growth of a movement like the J.P Movement, the Chipko movement, the Santhal movement, or any other people's movement, and analyse the steps that constituted it.



## Section 6. The Social Transformation Approach

The evolution of the various development approaches in the past few decades makes it clear that mere reform of the system will not bring about a development of the human being and of the human community in which each one will be able freely to exercise his or her faculties of reflecting, loving and associating with others, and taking decisions in every sphere of human existence. To find out experientially what approach is needed for true development, the group can enact the following three mimes and reflect in common on them.

### A. Crossing a River

Two lines, fairly wide and parallel, are drawn on the floor. These will indicate the banks of a river. Pieces of paper are placed in the river as stepping stones, with a large sheet of paper in the middle of the river, representing an island.

Two persons will stand on one bank, wanting to cross the river. One, stronger than the other, and this latter weaker, afraid and hesitant. The strong one offers to carry the weaker across. The offer is accepted, and the weaker person is carried over to the island.

They then notice a third person on the shore wanting help in crossing over. The strong person goes back to help. He first thinks of carrying this person, but changes his mind. He leads him by the hand for a few steps. The third person gains courage and crosses by himself, gaining confidence with each step.

They both go across from the island to the other side of the river, without paying attention to the first person. This one frantically gestures to them for help to get across, but to no avail. They have disappeared from view.

### Questions for Discussion :

1. What did you see happening in the mime?
2. What different approaches were used to help the two people across?
3. What could each person represent in real life?
4. What parallels do you see in real life?
5. Why does this happen?

## B. Development or Liberation

The mime begins with a person crouching down, his leg chained to a big block or stone. In the distance, martial music is heard, gradually growing to a crescendo, heralding, as it were, the dawn of liberation. The person slowly looks up and rises in expectation.

An impressive person marching in step to the music and holding a banner aloft, enters. On the banner the word "LIBERATION" is boldly inscribed. He embraces the first person, pins a badge or rosette on him and hands him the banner. The first person looks bewildered. He points to the chain. The impressive person only glances at the chain, quickly and smartly salutes and marches off as the music dies out.

### Questions for Discussion :

1. What did you see happening?
2. What does each of the characters represent for you?
3. What does the block and chain represent in real life?
4. What hinders true independence or true liberation in society today?

## C. Band aids for Arms!

In preparation for this mime, one of the three actors wears a coat, with his right hand hidden behind his back, and a false arm of rolled up newspapers in his right sleeve. Another actor should have at hand a box of band aids, with the label "Band Aids" prominently stuck on to it.

The first man walks on to the front, cheerful, but poorly dressed. The second, a very jolly looking person, enters and greets him very enthusiastically and energetically. He pats him on the back, smiles at him and shakes his right hand with great force, tearing it off roughly and walks away with it. The poor man looks bewildered and gazes at his empty sleeve.

At this point the third man walks in. He greets the first man, suddenly notices his armless sleeve. He shows that he is disturbed. In horror he runs off and returns quickly with a box of band aids. Showing it to the audience, he gives it to the first man, walking off, shaking his head in sorrowful sympathy.

The first man keeps looking at the box, then at his arm. He flings away the box and shakes his head in frustration!

Questions for Discussion :

1. What did you see happening?
2. Who or what did each of the three men represent?
3. What does your right arm represent? Who in society makes the poor man lose his right arm?
4. Was the response of the third man adequate or sufficient?
5. What else could the third man have done?
6. What similarities do you see between this situation and real life?



## Section 7. Case Studies on Various Approaches to Development

### A. Mother Teresa

Agnes Bojaxhiu was born in Skopje, Yugoslavia, of Albanian parents. At a very early age she was attracted to the life of a missionary in India. At eighteen, she entered the Missionary Order of the Loreto Sisters, taking the name of Teresa in memory of the Little Flower of Lisieux. She came to Calcutta on January 20, 1931, and for sixteen years she taught geography in one of the most prestigious convents in the city.

One day in 1946, she felt that God called her to go and live among the poorest of the poor in the slums of Calcutta. With permission from the Pope, in 1950 she founded a new religious order, the Missionaries of Charity, whose vocation was to relieve the misery of the most neglected human beings.

From the beginning of the congregation of the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa and her sisters are working in hundreds of homes and several thousand charitable foundations throughout India and all other continents, including Communist countries, taking care of the dying and those babies and adults forsaken on the pavements of modern cities.

It is a heroic task that Mother Teresa has taken up and it is hard to imagine many people in today's world ready to do what she is doing. Such work requires the courage and determination of sanctity. The service Mother Teresa is doing must be seen, all the same, in the context of development. Relief is not to be by-passed when working for development, but a development programme, be it relief, welfare, or oriented to economic growth of an individual or a community, can be counter-productive if it does not move towards bringing about greater justice and respect for the human being in a society.

What Mother Teresa is doing is cleaning up the garbage that society casts away in the form of victims of its oppression and neglect of the poor, of the refusal of society to give to all citizens the right to a decent human living and the assurance of the basic human amenities. It is important that we see the poor and the sick as the victims of an unjust social order. If we refuse to do anything to change this unjust and violent order, we are guilty of collaboration and apathy.

Because she cleans up what society does not like to see, because that would remind it that the majority of the Indian population are neglected so that the elite might live comfortably with untroubled minds, the elite and the rich will keep on glorifying Mother Teresa's work. They will shower favours and awards on her so that she might continue doing this cleaning job. This also enables them to divert the minds of people from the issue of social justice, which in no way do they want. Work for social justice is a threat to their own wealth, power and position. This work of Mother Teresa and her sisters helps immunise others from this crucial problem. Aneurin Bevan, the famous labour leader of Britain is reported to have said, "The lesson that history teaches us is that the rich will do anything for the poor, literally anything, except get off their backs."

If Mother Teresa were to introduce the questions like "Why are people allowed to die in the streets? Why do so many have to struggle to their death in hunger and disease?" the powerful elite would make sure that she would be silenced. As long as any individual or social work organisation indulges in relief and welfare, he will be accorded recognition and even awards from the government and the powerful elite. But as soon as he raises questions about the cause of the situation of misery and poverty, they turn against him as a subversive, as one who is a threat to their position of power and wealth.

Our criticism is not against Mother Teresa, but against the rich and elite who prevent the root causes of the problem to be explored through other approaches. We are not saying that charity is irrelevant today. Mother Teresa has done and continues to do wonderful work for the poor of this country. The central issue is whether there can ever be any adequate and effective substitute for social justice.

Charity is not enough, because it does not go to the root of the matter. Charity only rescues temporarily the victims of social oppression without doing anything to remove the oppression itself.

A report of the Synod of the Church of South India points out: "To continue merely helping the victims of the present system, however necessary this might be, without consciously working at the same time for the transformation of the whole system, is criminal irresponsibility in the face of the radical demands of the fullness of the love of Christ."

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the good points that you can discern in the work that Mother Teresa and her sisters, the Missionaries of Charity are doing?
2. Are they in any way aiming at tackling the root causes of the oppression and poverty in the country, or just dealing with the symptoms of injustice?
3. What do you foresee as the final results of the work the Missionaries of Charity are doing? Is it going to help society to become more just, equitable and sustainable, or will it have to keep going indefinitely as long as the social system is rooted in injustice?
4. Discuss the quotation from the report of the Synod of the Church of South India.
5. What would you envisage as necessary to be added to the work of the Missionaries of Charity in order to help towards a just and equitable society?
6. Mother Teresa says she is not a "social worker". She is very emphatic about this at all times: that whatever she is doing is for God. In her own words, "The difference is that they (i.e. social workers) are doing it for something and we are doing it to somebody. Because we cannot see Christ, we cannot express our love for Him: but our neighbours we can always see, and what we can do to them, that, if we saw Him, we would like to do for Christ". In what way is her attitude of faith and expressing her love of her neighbour different from that of a committed Christian who wants to do social work?

### B. Watershed Management

An issue that is indeed a burning critical problem for India is the ecological deterioration taking place all over the country. This issue has recently led to an upsurge of programmes of watershed management. Watershed management is based on a detailed study of the geographical conditions, annual rainfall, cropping pattern and irrigation requirements of an area. The rainfall that falls within the area covered by a watershed is harnessed through several means. One of them is afforestation of the surrounding hills. This provides a carpet of humus around the trees which prevents water from rushing down, causing soil erosion, and enables it to seep into the ground to add to the ground water basin in the area. Another means is desilting of the streams, rivers, lakes and tanks in the area so that more water can be accumulated, which also helps to increase



the ground water. a third means is the planting of trees in the plain area itself, which helps to increase the ground water.

In a drought-prone area in Mirzapur district in Uttar Pradesh, a novel experiment was tried in watershed management. The area of operation was about four hundred villages in four development blocks, covering a total area of 6,40,000 acres. The terrain consists of rocky hills of the Vindhyas, undulating fields and valleys traversed by small rivulets, which are dry for most part of the year. Nearly forty per cent of the total area is covered by forests and an equal area is cultivable land.

Rain water was impounded by constructing small bunds to irrigate the fields. These bunds created lakes of different sizes in the villages and the water stored in a higher level village could be utilised for irrigating fields in a lower village with contour canals. Pumps were installed so that water could be lifted to a higher plane by pumping it into high-rise water towers. The rivulets were cleared, and trees planted alongside their beds. In the hills, pits were dug and trees were planted.

The results of this experiment were even better than expected. With the increase of the ground water and tree cover, the fertility of the land increased, and there was an increased crop cultivation. The scheme solved the problem of ecological balance as it brought nearly 15 to 20 per cent of the area under water, 40 per cent under forests and the rest under cultivation. Besides, it provided an ideal habitat for a number of endangered species of birds.

Watershed management, therefore, is very necessary given the sad state of the ecology. But there are priorities to be established and followed in action if it is to be a programme that really helps the poor to gain bargaining power. A programme that aims at social transformation must enable the poor and oppressed majority of the people to be able to make their own decisions and become the primary agents of their own development.

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. From the ecological point of view, what is the necessity of and the advantages derived from a watershed management programme?
2. How has this programme in Mirzapur district been beneficial to the ecology of the area?
3. In this area of operation, sixty percent of the cultivable land belongs

to four per cent of the total population, consisting of big landlords and teniples, while sixty per cent of the population are mainly landless labourers. What would be the use of this watershed management programme for the landless poor?

3. Can the planting of trees benefit people who have no land to plant any trees?

4. Can a watershed management programme be the source of greater exploitation for those who own no land? How?

5. If a programme has to be a real community development programme, it must first of all benefit the most needy, can such a watershed programme be called a real community development programme? Why or why not?

6. Could you say that for watershed management to be really a community development programme, it must be preceded by an effective land reform programme. Is this possible when the owners of the land are not willing to part with even one fraction of their possessions? What means would you suggest need to be taken to make the laws establishing ceilings on land holdings effective?

7. If this primary issue of land reform is not attended to, do you foresee that watershed management will be a repetition of the green revolution which made the rich farmers richer and drove off the poor farmers and the landless labourers from their land and their villages into the slums and hovels of the cities?

8. What principles of community development would you educe from this case history?

### C. Women's Development Programme

An organisation, "Women's Call" was started by a young woman in 1982 in Bangalore. It works mainly with women of the slums of that city. It began by forming groups of women in four slums. Gradually, through a process of education, these slum women came to be critically aware of their own situation.

The women started their house work at 5.00 a.m., collecting water from nearby taps where there used to be a long queue, cooking the meal for their husbands who would take it to their place of work, tending the fire with dry twigs and bits of wood they had either collected from dustbins or bought at a high price on the previous evening on their way

back from work, taking care of their children, washing or bathing and dressing them, and by eight o'clock going to work.

At work, generally in the stone quarries or on construction sites, they would be given the more menial and back-breaking jobs, like carrying loads of bricks or mortar or crushing stones. At a few intervals some of them would take time off for nursing their babies whom they had brought along with them and had kept during the day in make-shift hammocks with scarce protection from the heat of the sun.

When their day's work was done, they returned home via the nearest market to buy lower grade vegetables and firewood, if they could not collect any on their way. They would have to prepare the night meal, wash the family clothes and bathe themselves in the dark before settling down to sleep.

The women came to realise that in all this they were oppressed by their husbands, exploited by their employers and the sellers in the market and by society at large.

To counteract this oppression, they realised the need of their organising themselves. But they also felt that to face these problems, the organisation of women only of one slum was not enough. They decided to join hands with the women of the other three slums where "Women's Call" was working. But even this number, they realised, was insufficient to succeed in facing a conflict with their own husbands, employers and other sectors of society.

So some of them, who had during the period of education which "Women's Call" had given them, manifested definite leadership qualities, went to other slums on their weekly holidays. They organised groups of women and built up awareness among them similar to the process "Women's Call" had gone through with them.

With the catalysing help of "Women's Call", these women decided to form several groups, like the construction workers' union, the quarry workers' union, the agarbatti workers' union, etc. These unions are now working on several issues like better working conditions, wages, health and maternity benefits.

In one slum that was constructed on the property of a religious organisation, the religious authority had got an eviction order on the slum



dwellers, while another part of the property was in the hands of a rich businessman, who was a strong supporter of that religious group, and a third by a shady joint called M - 's Bar. But these two were not asked to vacate. On the other hand, the aid of the police was utilised by the owners of the property to drive the slum dwellers away and to destroy their huts. The people tried to prevent this destruction, but in vain. So the women of many slums got together and have succeeded in getting a stay order on the eviction notice.

On the home front, too, they have been exerting pressure successfully. They have been able to gherao a man who had consistently indulged in wife-beating, and three men who were addicted to drink and were harassing their families when drunk. These have given up these practices and habits. (This case study is taken from Desmond D'Abreo : "From Development Worker to Activist" 2nd Edition, 1989, pp.400-401)

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the vision of development that "Women's Call" manifests in its work with the women of the slums?
2. What do you think were the obstacles the women faced in the process of their education and organisation :
  - a. from society in general,
  - b. from their employers,
  - c. from their husbands,
  - d. from other members of their families : mothers-in-law, etc.?
3. How do you suppose they overcame these difficulties?
4. What principles of community development would you deduce from this case history?

#### D. The Development Efforts of the Middle Class and Intelligentsia

In one of the largest suburbs of Bombay, a slum called Shivaram Wadi stands adjacent to a housing colony, 'Shilendra', which had been built by the parish church. Fr. Peter, from the parish, formed a group of interested lay people from the colony. They consisted of doctors, lawyers, architects, several businessmen and a number of their wives and daughters who wanted to do something for their poor neighbours.

The men were interested in doing something, but they had no time, because they were busy in their own jobs and professions, so they asked the ladies to take on the activities for the slum people. These ladies decided to go twice a week to the slum and meet the people. They were not bothered about ideas concerning development that the group used to discuss with Fr. Peter. They only wanted to do something concrete to help the poor. In their conversations with the people, they found many cases they could take up. A man who had been a cook, but now unemployed, was given a job as a cook with a well-to-do family. A young girl was given money as fees for a shorthand-typewriting course, a few women were given jobs as domestic helps with good Christian families in the colony. Many other persons were helped in a similar way.

The ladies were happy with their work. They used to organise dinner-parties to which they invited their friends. They themselves would cook the meal together and would ask their guests to pay Rs. 100/- or 150/- each for the dinner. This money was used to support their slum work. At the meetings of the group with Fr. Peter, he would, from time to time, invite social workers to talk to them. Some of these would talk of the need of organising the people to get better and more permanent houses, for better wages, for less harassment of the women by contractors and employers, etc. To this, the group, and especially the ladies, raised up their hands in horror! "How can we do such a thing as give this power to the people? If we do that, they will sit on our heads!" "If we get them to ask for better houses, they will be living too far to come to work in our houses", "They will demand more wages from us!", and so on.

The group therefore contented itself with helping individuals as they had done before. They also asked Fr. Peter not to get such social workers to talk to them, but to get more sensible people who can be realistic. One of them said, "These people are exaggerating. Do we not know that things are not so bad? The government makes laws for giving land to the tiller, minimum wages, etc. We are always seeing on TV how many programmes like the IRDP, DRDA, TRYSEMP, etc., are being launched for development of the poor. So these fellows should stop talking about oppression and exploitation. Let them read the papers and watch TV. They will change their communist talk, especially since Eastern Europe has shown very forcefully that communism has failed totally!"

The ladies continued their work with the slum people. But, they heard lots of grumbling among the slum dwellers. Some of the cases they had helped were "very ungrateful", they said. The cook had taken to the bottle and was not contributing in any way to the running of his home. The steno-typist had got a job, but was spending her money on the latest fashions in dresses, shoes, handbags and cassettes of disco music. The women who were doing housework were getting only about Rs. 50 a month and were accused by their employers' wives of pilfering rice, vegetables and small change.

The ladies got quite discouraged. "The people are ignorant, good-for-nothing, stupid, drunkards, crooked, always quarrelling" was what we, who had come as observers for one of their meetings, were told. "To work with them is very difficult, but I suppose this is what we, as good Christians, must do if we want to gain merit in the next life!" said one of them.

"No," said another. "It is these slum people that are spoilt by the city. Let us go to the villages. The other day, when we went for a trip to Karjat, we came across a group of tribals who are really cheated by the landlords and are practically starving. I was wondering if we could not work for them. They are much more simple people. We can start a grain bank project for them."

After some discussion, the plan was well accepted by the whole group. Some time later, the grain bank project was taken up. Some opposition was met from a small group of social workers who said that this was going to destroy the work they had been doing for many years trying to organise the tribals to get a better wage and release from indebtedness to the landlords. They pleaded with the ladies not to increase the tribals' dependency through their free gifts of grain. But these turned a deaf ear to them. "How did these communists land even among these tribals?" was the question one of the ladies asked at their next meeting.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. What is the vision of development of this group?
2. What do you feel are the values that are upheld by this or similar groups of people?
3. Will efforts like theirs with the slum people, or even with the tribals



achieve the goal of development that you believe we should be striving for? Why? Why not?

4. What are the good points of this programme?

5. What are its weaknesses?

6. What should be the way in which we can get the middle class and intelligentsia to be involved in working for people's empowerment? Should they go far from their homes or concentrate on helping those poor and neglected people who are in their neighbourhood? Why?

## E. Socialism and Christianity

"I am sure that many members of the clergy are revulsed at the thought that our brand of socialism is one based on Marxist-Leninist principles for they cannot forget that Marx said of religion that it was the opium of the masses. Whatever his own religious views might have been, and he was free to express them, I wish to stand firm on the assertion that the morality of socialism in terms of its principles and objectives to the people is far higher than the morality of capitalism, if capitalism has any morality at all. Indeed the issues can be reduced to one of conflict between morality and immorality.

"As we have repeatedly held, ZANU does not see any contradiction between socialism and Christianity. Indeed we would expect that a greater and quicker response to our socialist call would be forthcoming from those who profess Christianity than from the non-Christian circles. I admit that the earlier practice of socialism in some countries led to the near extinction of Christianity in those countries, but that was also because Christianity in those countries had stood for the old order and had resisted the new social order. In socialist countries like Poland and Bulgaria, Christianity has been allowed to develop unabated in the transformative process from capitalism to communism.

"If Christianity's main criticism of socialism or communism is that there is too much of materialism and very little of God in it, my retort is : Give it a God, the God of socialism, but please, never the God of capitalism. In my view, true

Christianity should feel more at home in a socialist environment than in a capitalist one."

Robert Mugabe, First Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, from a speech to the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, February 1982.

"No historical revolution can actualise the infinite possibilities of justice and the total solidarity of the Kingdom of God. Our acceptance of the revolutionary process does not involve naivete or blind enthusiasm, much less, the creation of a new idol which we adore without questioning. The dignity of man, responsibility and liberty are attitudes that cannot be given up if there has to be an active participation in the revolutionary process....

"The conscious and active participation of the people who form the majority in the revolutionary process is of utmost importance.

"Many of us will be fearful and anxious that this process may lead to socialism. If, as some think, socialism defeats itself by depriving individuals and peoples of the capacity to be the architects of their own history, if it attempts to subject the people blindly to the manipulation and dictates of those who arbitrarily exercise power, then we cannot accept such an unauthentic or spurious socialism. Nor can we accept a socialism which, transgressing its competence, would attempt to deprive the individual of the right to have religious motivation in his life, or of the right to express this motivation and his conviction publicly, whatever his religious affiliation.

"If, on the contrary, socialism, as it should, means priority of the interests of the Indian people, and the realisation of a nationally planned economy which stresses solidarity and increasing participation of all, that is the socialism we could work for. Such a social programme which guarantees a common utilisation of goods and resources, and which, on this basis of satisfying the basic needs of all, enhances the quality of human life, would be quite a just programme. If socialism means a progressive decrease of injustices and of the traditional ine-

qualities between urban and rural areas, between remuneration of intellectual and manual labour, of the age-old economic, social and cultural discrimination between the sexes, if it means the participation of the worker in the produce of his labour and setting an end to economic alienation, then there is nothing in Christianity which would be opposed to this process.

"If socialism implies that power is exercised from the perspective of the great majority and with increasing participation of an organised people, thus bringing about a real transfer of power to the popular classes, then again there is only encouragement and support for it in our faith.

"If socialism leads to cultural processes that arouse in the masses of the people a sense of dignity and encourages them to accept responsibility and demand their rights, then it constitutes a process of humanisation in accord with the human dignity proclaimed by our faith."

Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Nicaragua,  
November 17, 1979; pp.5, 6-7

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. In view of the events of late 1989 in Eastern Europe, would you say that socialism is now dead, and that it should have no place in human society? Why or Why not?
2. "Capitalism is bad in its essence, Socialism is bad in its distortion."

Bishop Helder Von Camera of Recife, Brazil

Discuss.



## Section 8. Basic Principles of Development

From the evolution of development approaches in India and the case studies above which the group will have discussed, the following principles of development can be derived. These are the yardstick or criteria for any genuine development approach:

1. The human person is the primary reality of development. Development does not involve big projects, large finances, huge buildings, etc. If these are put up and each and every human being is not given a greater scope for exercising his faculties of freely reflecting, loving and deciding, the whole programme is not only an utter failure, but an exercise in counter-development.
2. The Community must be the planning subject, the primary agent and the authentic result of the whole development process. If someone else plans a project, if someone else is implementing and managing it, how can it be called a community development programme? Rather it is negating the very faculties that God has given each person : the ability to think and plan for himself. Of course, because of centuries of oppression during which these faculties have been stunted, our people need an orientation, education and gradual practice in actualising these potentialities. But can a programme be justified if it does not as early as possible give the people the responsibility to plan, implement, manage and evaluate their own programmes? Is this not denying or unnecessarily procrastinating their use of these God-given faculties?
3. Service through Identification. Development work is not a commuting job. It is essential that a person who is involved in it incarnate himself or herself with the people, so that he might be able to think like they do, understand what they feel and think, even if he does not agree with them. The genuine social worker lives with the people, and tries not to sympathise with them, which is an attitude of superiority, but to empathise with them, to feel as they feel and to suffer as they suffer.
4. The use, as far and as early as possible of indigenous natural and human resource. Not only should we first try to see what contributions we can get from the people for their development, but also to try to discover the indigenous methods of development that they have had for centuries. These, unfortunately, have been totally disregarded with the adulation we have for foreigners starting from the British times, and now with the

subservient attitude that is widespread towards the funding agencies. It is so tragic to witness the slavish way in which people, even priests, deal with representatives of foreign funding agencies. It only goes to show how much more importance is given to money than to our people in the process of "doing social work"!

## Section 9. Statement of the Group on Development

We have studied the situation that exists in India and have identified the root causes of under-development and oppression of the majority of the Indian population. We have then gone on to see the psychology of the poor and marginalised sector of society and analysed the nature of poverty. From there we have seen the way in which attempts have been made during the past few decades to bring about the development and liberation of these oppressed people and finally derived some principles on which the development process should be founded.

As a conclusion to this section, the group shall proceed to make a summary of all that has gone before by working out its own statement on Development. For this, it will discuss the following questions, and write out very brief responses to each question.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What is your assessment of the present situation of under-development in our country?
2. What is the cause of under-development?
3. What is the goal towards which all development work should strive?
4. What is the process of authentic development?
5. Who is the target population of development processes? What are their chief characteristics?
6. What must they acquire as the end-point of the development process?
7. In the light of all this, what must be the task of those who come from the higher sections of society and want to enable them to bring about their own liberation?
8. Would there be any place for economic programmes in this approach? How should they be worked out?

### A Sample Statement on Development

India is teeming with a large number of people who are poor, marginalised and oppressed. Their oppressors are a small elite who enjoy economic power, political force and social status. Injustice is inherent in the very system and is rooted in selfishness, the excessive profit motive, prestige, rivalry, competition, all of which are knit together by all pervasive consumerism.



The majority of our people are ignorant, there is a massive overpopulation and a wide-spread illiteracy among more than fifty per cent of the Indian people. But these are not the root cause of underdevelopment. They are only symptoms of the deeper malaise of injustice inherent in the system and the selfishness of human persons, which finds its source in the forces of evil at work in the world.

We seek a society where people can live as real human beings, able to fulfill their basic human needs, have equal rights and opportunities, as well as the right to live in a healthy social and natural environment. These rights are also joined by the obligation to help secure this environment for future generations. Each Indian must be able to actualise the God-given potentials of reflecting for himself or herself, loving others freely and being able to form associations and organisations with all whom he or she desires. Finally every Indian must be able to take his or her own decisions in every sphere of human existence.

The exercise of these faculties must not only respect the use of the rights and faculties of others, but must also be exercised in a community of persons, for the human person is essentially a social being and finds fulfillment of his or her personhood only in a community.

The underprivileged, oppressed, exploited, neglected and poor majority of our population, such as the unorganised agricultural and industrial workers, ambulant vendors and fishermen, is the target of the development process. These people are generally jobless, landless, underpaid, underemployed and malnourished, and are generally living below the poverty line. Most of them being still unorganised, have no access to political power. They are fatalistic and influenced by the foreign, consumerist culture which taxes their scarce resources.

The process of development is a continuous and on-going process, having as its ultimate goal the enabling of each person to put into action the God given faculties mentioned above. This can be achieved only in a society that respects each person and expresses this respect through equity and justice.

The people who are to be the agents of this change must be the poor and oppressed people themselves who are now under-privileged, marginalised, exploited and living in sub-human conditions. They must be enabled to work for their own development in order to acquire through

the development process their own self-determination in every sphere of life.

In the light of all this, it is clear that those from the economically and socially higher sectors of society who want to help the people to be their own liberators, must only be enablers. They must strive to bring a critical awareness of the reality of their situation to these people. They must enable them to organise themselves to bring about social justice. In this process, they must sincerely strive to identify themselves with the oppressed and the marginalised.

This means that these enablers, or animators, must go to the people, live among them, learn from them, plan with them and work with them. They must start from what they know, build on what they have, teach by showing concrete examples from their experience, their life-style and behaviour. Through these means, local community action revolving around basic immediate needs can be generated, further inspiring the people and building their self-confidence to confront bigger problems and larger issues. By linking up with other communities and sectors on a district, regional or national scale, the vision of a just society can be gradually realised.

Economic programmes, as well as emergency relief operations in times of natural or man-made disasters, to answer the basic needs of the victims, can serve as entry points towards other related problems and programmes. These economic programmes should involve the people's participation from the beginning to the end, so that they become the primary agents of planning, implementation, management and monitoring of the whole process.

#### The Voice of the Voiceless

Father,  
how can we fail  
to gather all humankind  
into prayer,  
since your Divine Son  
our brother,  
Jesus Christ,  
shed his blood  
for all people,  
of all lands,

of all times?

But hear, O Lord  
my special prayer  
for my people  
the voiceless ones.

There are thousands  
and thousands  
of human creatures  
in the poor countries,  
and in the slums  
of the rich countries  
with no right  
to raise their voices,  
no possibility  
of claiming,  
of protesting,  
however just  
are the rights  
they have to uphold.  
The homeless,  
the starving,  
the ragged,  
the wasted,  
with no chance  
of education,  
no work,  
no future  
no hope;

they may end up  
believing  
it was meant to be  
and losing heart -  
become the silent,  
the voiceless ones.  
If all of us  
who believed in you  
had helped our rich brothers  
by opening their eyes,



stirring their consciences,  
unjust people  
would not have advanced  
and the gap  
between rich and poor,  
between individuals and groups,  
between countries,  
even between continents,  
would not be so glaring.

Do in us, O Lord,  
What we have failed  
and still fail  
to do.

How difficult it is  
to get beyond the barrier  
of Aid, of gifts,  
of assistance,  
and reach the realm  
of justice!

The privileged grow angry:  
Our judgment  
is unfair, they say.  
Meanwhile they discover  
subversion  
and communism  
in the most democratic,  
the most human,  
the most Christian gestures.  
Amen.

Dom Helder Camara : The Desert is Fertile.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE UNFOLDING OF GOD'S PLAN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

#### Introduction

As Christians, we believe that God has revealed his Word to us in the Bible. But, in order to find his specific message for us, his Word in this Holy Book must be read in the context of our situation today. For we should be seriously aware that the message of God is not given to us in a vacuum. It is given as an answer to the problems and issues we come across in our daily life and in our contacts with others, both on a micro and personal level as well as on a vast and social level. In his Good News, which is found in the Bible, God gives a personal answer to each of us here in India, to the problems that we really experience. Besides, it challenges us to deal from a God's view point with our real life problems. If this were not so, his Bible would have no relevance to us. It would be incapable of enabling us to transform our own lives or the life of our community and society.

In spite of several efforts made by various people and governments on various levels throughout a long period of time, we realise that development and justice are not anywhere in sight. This following question then springs before our minds:

"Is it possible to achieve total liberation of the whole person, of the whole society without recourse to theological and religious resources? Can human beings transcend themselves and their limitations by drawing from their internal capacities alone, without reference to a reality that is greater, outside of and beyond themselves?

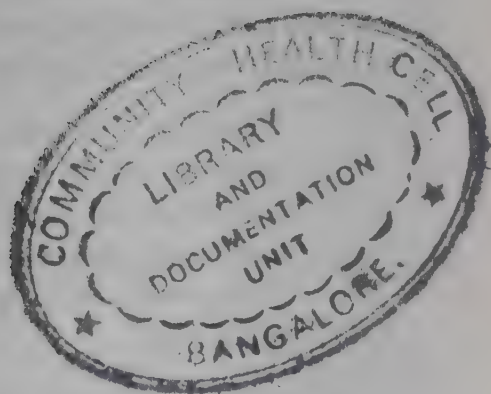
"This is where the Gospel in general and the concept of 'good news to the poor' in particular, comes in quite effectively. Here is the reality to which we can refer in seeking direction for our liberation programme. Jesus, the man who could love through anger, who loved all the way to suffering and through suffering to victory, addressed all liberation movements from the vantage point of an accomplished, liberated liberator. That is why he could liberate others. And that is the crux of the matter

: liberators of mankind must be integrated and liberated in their personalities."

-Canaan Banana : The Gospel according to the Ghetto, p.76

In Jesus, the man who could love all people, and who loved us all the way to suffering and through suffering to victory, God gives the way to work out all movements for development and liberation.

An important objective of this chapter is to help you, the reader, to reflect as deeply as possible in a group, on the biblical teaching on God's relationships with the poor and the rich, his attitude and that of the Church towards community sharing, justice, wealth and poverty.





## Section 1. God sides with the Poor

When God started out on his work of creation, with the human person as the centre of all that he had made, he already entered on a plan of salvation. It would be incomplete to see this plan merely as a spiritual one - a plan "to save souls". It encompassed the whole of the human person, who is essentially spirit embodied in matter. The human person is saved not as a soul but as a person, body and soul. So too, the human person is saved not as an individual but as a member of a community, in which various social relationships are necessarily involved, be they economic, social, political and cultural.

Besides spiritual redemption, the salvation of the human person includes their economic liberation from poverty and misery, as well as their political liberation from slavery and deprivation of their personal autonomy. In all the pivotal points in the history of salvation, we find that God works, very concretely and definitely, for the poor. We can even say, without hesitation, that at these pivotal moments, he takes sides with the poor. We shall look more closely at the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, the Destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent Captivity, the coming of Jesus Christ, which are the pivotal events in the history of salvation and try to see how God manifests in all these events his primary concern for the poor.

### A. The Exodus

In this crucial event of the history of salvation, God displayed his power in order to free oppressed slaves. His call to Moses at the burning bush was to end suffering and injustice

Then the Lord said, "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt; I have heard them cry out to be rescued from their slave drivers. I know all about their sufferings, and so I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of Egypt into a spacious land, one which is rich and fertile".

Exodus 3:7-10

This Exodus event is not an isolated once-and-for-all happening. Every year at the harvest festival, the Israelites repeated a liturgical

confession celebrating the way in which God acted to free a poor, oppressed people:

In the Lord's presence you will recite these words: My ancestor was a wandering Aramean, a homeless refugee, who took his family to Egypt to live. They were few in number when they went there, but they became a strong and powerful nation. The Egyptians treated us harshly and forced us to work as slaves. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors for help.

He heard us and saw our suffering and misery. By his great power and strength he rescued us from Egypt.

Deuteronomy 26 :5-8

Though this liberation was not the only end of the Exodus, for through it God wanted to create a special people with a covenant, yet, it was at the heart of God's design:

Now I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, who the Egyptians have enslaved and I have remembered my covenant. So tell the Israelites that I say this to them, 'I am the Lord your God. I will rescue you and set you free from your slavery to the Egyptians. I will raise my mighty arm to bring terrible punishment upon them, and I will save you. I will make you my own people and I will be your God. You will know that I am the Lord your God when I set you free from slavery in Egypt'.

Exodus 6 :5-7

The preamble to the ten commandments also begins with this revolutionary truth:

"I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from Egypt when you were slaves. You shall worship no other but me...."

Deuteronomy 5 :6 & Exodus 20 :1

Unless we see the Exodus as a liberation from oppression of a poor people, we distort the biblical interpretation of this great event. This is the great lesson that was taught in the Bible through the outstanding event

of the Exodus. "To struggle against misery and exploitation and to build a just society is already to be part of the saving action" or "of a saving process which embraces the whole of man and all human history", says Gustavo Gutierrez in his "A Theology of Liberation".

### Exodus 6 : 2-9

God spoke to Moses and said, 'I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty. But I did not let myself be known to them by my name JEHOVAH. Moreover, I made a covenant with them to give them Canaan, the land where they settled for a time as foreigners. And now I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, enslaved by the Egyptians, and I have called my covenant to mind. Say therefore to the Israelites. "I am the Lord. I will release you from your labours in Egypt. I will rescue you from slavery there. I will redeem you with arm outstretched and with mighty acts of judgment. I will adopt you as my people, and I will become your God. You shall know that I, the Lord, am your God, the God who released you from your labours in Egypt. I will lead you to the land which I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it you for your possession. I am the Lord".

Moses repeated these words to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him, they had become impatient because of their cruel slavery.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What different reasons are given for God's decision to liberate the Israelite people in Exodus 6: 2-9 ?
2. On the basis of the following four texts, can you discern how central to God's purpose at the Exodus was the liberation of the oppressed people?

#### a. Psalms 103:6-7

The Lord is righteous in his acts;  
he brings justice to all who have been wronged.  
He taught Moses to know his way  
and showed the Israelites what he could do.



#### b. Genesis 15:12-14

Then, as the sun was going down, a trance came over Abram and great fear came upon him. The Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your descendants will be aliens living in a land that is not theirs; they will be slaves, and will be held in oppression there for four hundred years. But I will punish that nation whose slaves they are, and after that they shall come out with great possessions.

#### c. Exodus 3:7-10

The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their outcry against their slave-masters. I have taken heed of their sufferings and have come down to rescue them from the power of Egypt, and to bring them up out of that country into a fine broad land; it is a land flowing with milk and honey.... The outcry of the Israelites has now reached me; yes, I have seen the brutality of the Egyptians towards them. Come now; I will send you to Pharaoh and you shall bring my people Israel out of Egypt.'

#### d. Deuteronomy 26:1-11

When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you to occupy as your patrimony and settle in it, you shall take the first-fruits of all the produce of the soil, which you gather in from the land which the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling place for his Name and come to the priest, whoever he shall be in those days. You shall say to him, 'I declare this day to the Lord your God that I have entered the land which the Lord swore to our forefathers to give us.' The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. Then you shall solemnly recite before the Lord your God: 'My father was a homeless Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small company and lived there until they became a great, powerful and numerous nation. But the Egyptians ill-treated us, humiliated us and imposed cruel slavery upon us. Then we cried to the Lord the God of our fathers for

help, and he listened to us and saw our humiliation, our hardship and distress; and so the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying deeds, and with signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I have brought the first-fruits of the soil which thou, O Lord, hast given me.' You shall then set the basket before the Lord your God and bow down in worship before him. You shall all rejoice, you and the Levites and the aliens living among you, for all the good things which the Lord your God has given to you and to your family.

3. From these texts, what do you deduce as the reasons for God's decision to liberate the Israelites?
4. Do these texts not emphasise that the liberation of the oppressed is God's central purpose?
5. Most of the theologians today, especially those in South America, as well as those in the countries of Africa and of Asia, like South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India, in other words, the countries of the Third World and the Black American theologians, see this emphasis on liberation in the Biblical teaching on Exodus. Why do you think that it is mainly theologians from these countries and from the oppressed communities, like the coloured in the United States, who lay this emphasis on liberation?
6. Do you think this is touching on the very kernel of the Biblical message?
7. What would you say to a person who insisted that this is a truncated and distorted view of the Biblical message?

## **B. Destruction of Jerusalem and the Captivity of Israel**

### **The Role of the Prophets in this Period**

#### **Who is a Prophet?**

Many of us have a wrong impression that a prophet is one who foretells the future. This might be part of the task of a prophet, but if we study the prophets of the Old Testament, as well as the prophets of the New Testament, like John the Baptist, we find that more than foretelling the future, they have to uncover

and convey God's message that lies hidden in the events of the present. The following are some characteristics that all prophets have in common.

- "1. A prophet is one who speaks to God's people in God's name, inspired by God's Spirit, anointed and sent by God.
2. One who has come very close to God, and has had a deep faith experience.
3. One who emerges from the common people, often rejected by his own people, a lone voice in the wilderness.
4. One who proclaims the Kingdom and its value system, calling for a radical change of heart and a change of unjust systems, governments and structures, calling for a turning away from all evil, violence and social sin, injustice and oppression.
5. One who listens to God's voice in people.
6. One who looks at historical events, and sees God's hand there, who reads the signs of the times and the writings on the wall of society, interprets the events and gives God's meanings, discerns God's will, analyses society and its structures.
7. One who lends voice to God's suppressed cries among the people.
8. One who challenges the unjust and evil people and evil systems, rulers or government. The system can get rid of the prophet breaking him or her or by killing him. But the prophet rises again in many more persons.
9. One who watches like an alert watch-dog, a bull dog, though bound and chained by many limitations, who manages to rouse up people - especially when the night is darkest and when all live in fear.
10. One who denounces - announces; uproots - plants; breaks down and builds up a new value system.
11. One who effectively communicates God's Word through symbols, images, symbolic actions, personal life style, cyc-  
openers, parables, shocks and jolts.



12. One who is aware of his own weakness, limitations and failures, who needs and seeks group support.

13. One who prepares the way and then quietly fades out into the background."

Quoted from Alex Carvalho in "Sharing" Bulletin for Priests, published in Bombay.

### The Prophets of the time of the Captivity of Israel speak of Deliverance Now

"Salvation in the prophets is not primarily and immediately eternal salvation or heaven. They foresee a time of blessing, prosperity, peace, happiness and justice in the concrete terms of a return from exile, or deliverance (liberation) from war, from domination, from captivity. And this is seen as the natural consequence of the justice that is being practised now, or that the people are being challenged to practise now. The only reason why the prophet foretells this is to ensure that the people continue in their good works or change their existing evil ways.

"Metanoia literally means a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of one's ways, of one's behaviour. And this change is always seen as a change from unjust behaviour to just behaviour. God's demand for change is always a demand for justice."

Albert Nolan: Biblical Spirituality, p.18

"When justice does not exist, God is not known; he is absent. 'God is everywhere,' says the priest to the sacristan in Jose Maria Arguedas' novel Todas las sangres. And the sacristan, who knows no metaphysics, but is well acquainted with injustice and oppression, replies with accurate Biblical intuition: 'Was God in the heart of those who broke the body of the innocent teacher, Bellido? Is God in the bodies of the engineers who are killing "Las Esmeralda"? in the official who took the corn fields away from their owners...?' Likewise, Medellin asserts: 'Where this social peace does not exist there will we

find social, political, economic and cultural inequalities, there will we find the rejection of the peace of the Lord, and a rejection of the Lord himself' ("Peace" no 14). On the other hand, if justice is done, if the alien, the orphan and the widow are not oppressed, 'Then I will let you live in this place, in the land which I gave long ago to your forefathers for all time.'"

Gustavo Gutierrez : Theology of Liberation,  
SCM Press, 1977, p.195.

When they settled in the promised land, the Israelites discovered that Yahweh's passion for justice was a two-edged sword : when they were oppressed, it led to their freedom, but when they were oppressors it led to their destruction.

The message of the prophets was that God destroyed Israel because of its ill-treatment of the poor. The way they exploited the poor economically was the reason why the chosen people were sent into captivity. In the 8th century B.C., at the height of their political success and economic prosperity, God sent Amos to tell them that the northern kingdom would be destroyed. Under the economic prosperity, Amos saw terrible oppression:

Amos 2 : 6-7

"The people of Israel have sinned again and again, and for this I will certainly punish them. They sell into slavery honest men who cannot pay their debts, poor men who cannot repay even the price of a pair of sandals. They trample down the weak and helpless and push the poor out of the way".

Amos 5 : 5-15

"How terrible it will be for you who live such an easy life in Zion and for you that feel safe in Samaria - great men of this nation Israel, you to whom the people go for help! Go and look at the city of Calneh. Then go on to the Philistine city of Gath. Were they any better than the kingdoms of Judah and Israel? Was their territory larger than yours? You refuse to admit that a day of disaster is coming, but what you do only brings that

day closer. How terrible it will be for you that stretch out on your luxurious couches, feasting on veal and lamb! You like to compose songs like David did, and play them on harps. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest perfumes, but you do not mourn over the ruins of Israel. So you will be the first to go into exile. Your feasts and banquets will come to an end".

"You people hate anyone who challenges injustice and speaks the whole truth in court. \*You have oppressed the poor and robbed them of their grain. And so you will not live in the fine stone houses you build or drink of the beautiful vineyards you plant.\* I know how terrible your sins are and how many crimes you have committed. You persecute good men, take bribes, and prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts, for keeping quiet in such times is the clever thing to do!!!

"Make it your aim to do what is right, and not what is evil, so that you may live. Then the Lord almighty really will be with you as you claim he is. Hate what is evil, love what is right, and see that justice prevails in courts. Perhaps the Lord will be merciful to the people of this nation who are still left alive".

Archeologists have confirmed Amos' picture of shocking extremes of wealth and poverty. In the early days of settlement in Canaan, land was distributed equally. All Israelites enjoyed a similar standard of living - all houses, as early as the 10th century B.C., were found approximately of the same size. But two centuries later, in Amos' time, things were different: there were bigger and better houses in one area, while the poorer houses were huddled together in another, like in a Dalit colony of any village in present-day India. Hence Amos' warning in verse 11 (cf. text between \*s)

All the same, we must not forget that idolatry was another cause of destruction :

"The people have broken the covenant I made with them... They took their silver and gold and made idols for their own destruction"

Hosea 8:1-6

"People of Israel, stop celebrating your festivals like pagans. You have turned away from your God and have been unfaithful

to him. All over the land you have sold yourselves like prostitutes to the god Baal and have loved the corn you thought he paid you with! ... The people of Israel will not remain in the Lord's land but will have to go back to Egypt and will have to eat forbidden food in Assyria"

Hosea 9 : 1-3

The same fate held for the Southern kingdom because of economic exploitation :

You are doomed! You make unjust laws that oppress my people. That is how you prevent the poor from having their rights and from getting justice. That is how you take the property that belongs to widows and orphans. What will you do when God punishes you? What will you do when he brings disaster on you from a distant country? Where will you run to find help? Where will you hide your wealth? You will be killed in battle or dragged off as prisoners. Yet even so the Lord's anger will not be ended; his hand will still be stretched out to punish"

Isaiah 10: 1-4

Amos 4 : 1-3

Listen to this,  
You cows of Bashan who live on the hill of Samaria,  
you who oppress the poor and crush the destitutes,  
who say to your lords, 'Bring us drink':  
the Lord God has sworn by his holiness  
that your time is coming  
when men shall carry you away on their shields  
and your children in fish-baskets.  
You shall be each carried straight out  
through the breaches in the walls  
and pitched on a dunghill,  
This is the very word of the Lord.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why does the prophet denounce the comfortable, well-off ladies so harshly and predict terrible destruction?



2. What contact do you think the ladies (whose affluent lifestyles were possible because their husbands oppressed the poor) had with the poor? Who would be their equivalents in today's society?

3. What is the theme common in these following texts which you will find in the appendix to this chapter on the destruction of Israel and Judah? In what way do they show that the God of the Exodus is still at work with the same concern for the poor and oppressed?

See in Appendix:

- |                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| #1. Jeremiah 22:1-5;   | #2. Micah 2:1-10;         |
| #3. Zephaniah 3:1-6;   | #4. Zechariah 7:8-14;     |
| #5. 1 Kings 21: 1-19;  | #6. Isaiah 3: 1-25;       |
| #7. Jeremiah 5: 26-29; | #8. Jeremiah 7: 1-15;     |
| #9. Jeremiah 12: 1-7;  | #10. Jeremiah 22 : 13-19; |
| #11. Micah 3: 1-12;    | #12. Micah 6:9-15;        |
| #13. Amos 4: 6-9;      | #14. Amos 6: 4-7.         |

### C. The Incarnation : Jesus

Jesus Christ was God's most complete revelation of himself. His mission was clearly stated at the beginning of his public life :

Luke 4 : 16-21

So he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up and went to synagogue on the Sabbath day as he regularly did. He stood up to read the lesson and was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the scroll and found the passage which says, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him.

He began to speak: 'Today', he said, 'in your very hearing this text has come true.'

## The Longing of all Peoples

This is a key text for the vision we should have for development. It would be useful to spend some time in reflection on it. Luke does not tell us what Jesus spoke after reading this text, but undoubtedly he created quite an impact on his listeners. Some of them may have been proud of their hometown boy, who came back to his native place and could speak so well. Others would have been proud of their relative and friend. Some were annoyed by what he said, and still others were led to a homicidal rage against him.

We can very well see in this first statement that Jesus made at the start of his public ministry, a similarity with the presentation of his credentials by an ambassador of a country to the ruler or president of the country to which he is sent. At his first visit to this important dignitary, he expresses clearly in his credentials what his mandate is with regard to the work he will be doing as the representative of his own country.

At his first public statement, Jesus has openly declared what his task or mission is going to be. He has been anointed by the Spirit of God to give the good news to the poor, release prisoners, give sight to the blind, liberate the oppressed and announce the acceptable year of the Lord. He did not declare that his task was to make many converts to Christianity, or to make them frequent the church or temple regularly, or to contribute to the support of their religious leaders, or to initiate or observe any rituals. It was his primary responsibility to work with and for the poor and to bring about justice in the society of human beings.

Some interpreters take these words only in a spiritual sense, but Christ took these words of Isaiah in the context in which he spoke to them. In their original Old Testament setting, they unquestionably referred to oppression and captivity.

This manifesto of Jesus must be understood in a strongly social sense. This becomes even clearer when we notice the phrase Luke omits from the original text of Isaiah, namely, "to heal the brokenhearted". By deliberately excluding this phrase, Luke intends to avoid the danger of 'spiritualising' Jesus' mission, of watering down its 'earthiness'. The salvation Jesus announced here is primarily a liberation from all forms of oppression. Luke adds the phrase, "To set the downtrodden free" from Isaiah 58 :6, so that there can be no doubt in the minds of his readers.

But that is not all. To what we may term Jesus' policy statement, we must add many other passages in the New Testament where a concern for the right of the poor is paramount. The Beatitudes (despiritualised in Luke), the stories of the Good Samaritan, of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Rich Young Man, the Cleansing of the Temple and Jesus' marked preference for the outcaste - to list but a few, - all point us in the direction of striving for a more just world.

What did Jesus mean by these various tasks that he took upon himself? He was anointed by the Spirit first to preach the good news to the poor. What is good news to the poor? Is it good news for a man who is starving, or oppressed by deprivation of just wages that God sends his son to die for his people? or that they will be saved in an eternal bliss after death? The poor are not interested in these blessings as much as they are at the moment concerned about the basic necessities of life that they have not got. They are more interested in bread and rice than in the salvation that God will give them after they die. What Jesus meant was that he was going to give them good news that would indeed be recognised by them as good news. This was that they are created to God's image and likeness and are therefore by very nature called to be free, and to live with dignity as human beings. The good news he brings is that every person, however poor and oppressed, has it in himself to bring about his own liberation. The poor are to base their lives on this hope, which is not just an idle dream but something that can be realised by themselves.

Jesus talked about releasing prisoners, those who are constrained by the malice and hatred of their fellow human beings, imprisoned in the bonds of discrimination, exploitation and oppression. He was to give sight to the blind. This was not merely and necessarily the restoration of physical sight, but the giving of a deeper sight, to which he referred when he said on another occasion, "I have come into this world that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." He came for the liberation of the oppressed, as was obvious in all his actions.

Finally, he came to proclaim or announce the acceptable year of the Lord. We must note that in the Bible, the word "proclaim" or "announce" is not just a verbal statement, but is indeed a verbal proclamation which already initiates an action. Jesus' mission was to set afoot the acceptable year of the Lord. Most biblical scholars agree that the accept-



able year of the Lord is the Jubilee year, spoken of in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus. This Jubilee year is a landmark in the progress of the community of Israel. During it, as we shall see later, all debts were to be waived away, those who were slaves were to be freed, the land which had been bought was to revert to its original owner. It is very clear that the purpose of the celebration of this year was the attempt to go back to the state of original justice in which the society of Israel was founded. Jesus was declaring that he had come to initiate this state of original justice among all mankind. This utopia, the longing of all peoples, is the object of the preaching of Jesus. He promises that it will no longer be utopia, but a reality introduced by God.

"For Jesus, then, liberation is total liberation. And thereby he identifies the root of all injustice and exploitation: breach of friendship, breach of love. We are not presented with a liberation open to a 'spiritualistic' interpretation, still so tightly clung to in certain Christian circles. Hunger and justice are not just economic and social questions. They are global human questions, and they challenge our way of living the faith in its very roots...."

"The gospel, read from the viewpoint of the poor, from the viewpoint of the militancy of their struggles for liberation, convokes a popular church - that is, a church born of the people, the 'poor of the earth', the predilect of the kingdom, 'God's favourites'. It is a church rooted in a people that snatches the gospel from the hands of the great ones of this world. It prevents it from being utilised henceforward as an element in the justification of a situation, contrary to the will of the Liberator-God."

Gustavo Gutierrez : *ibid.*p.165.

"This meaning of Jesus comes through very clearly if we see that background in which He lived. He was fully aware of the society into which he had come. The Jewish community during the time of Jesus was dominated over by three aristocracies. The Pharisees had a religious domination over the people, and benefited from this domination by way of the temple taxes, the fines and penalties for breakages of the miniscule regulations and laws they had imposed on the people.



The Saducees were the landlords who exploited their labourers with the least possible wages and extracted maximum work from them. The Scribes and lawyers imposed an ideology on the people that left them totally at the mercy of their rulers, both religious and temporal. Besides these various oppressions, the poor shared with other Jews the heavy oppression of their foreign rulers, the Romans.

"The poor to whom Jesus addressed the good news were the inheritors of centuries of oppression through foreign domination and the worse domination by their own people who were appointed by the foreign Roman rulers. These hated the Romans, but used the power given by them to bleed the people for their own vested interests.

"The whole life of Jesus was a struggle against this injustice and this was experienced by him in a deep identification with the poor. 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has not any place to lay down his head'!

"Here is a sign of the total about-face. Whosoever succeeds in introducing such realities, he will be the liberator of humanity. Christ understands himself as the liberator because he preaches, presides over and is himself inaugurating the kingdom of God. This kingdom is a total, global and structural transfiguration and revolution of the reality of human beings; it is the cosmos purified of all evils and full of the reality of God. The kingdom of God is not to be in another world, but is the old world transformed into a new one.... The kingdom of God does not simply mean the annihilation of sin, but the annihilation of all that sin means for human beings, society and the cosmos. In the kingdom, pain, blindness, hunger, tempests, sin and death will not have their turn."

Leonardo Boff: Jesus Christ Liberator, p.52

"Kingdom of God undoubtedly possessed a political connotation for the Jews, for whom politics was a part of religion, and Kingdom of God concretely designed liberation

from all oppressive forces."

"Like Jesus, the church ought to give special attention to the nobodies and those without a voice. It should emphasise the future that he promises for this world, a world in which the future kingdom is growing between the wheat and the cockle, not for a few privileged people, but for all."

"Jesus' Kingdom cannot be reduced to a part of reality such as politics. He came to heal all reality, in all its dimensions, cosmic, human and social...He signified something much more profound, namely that he demands a conversion of persons and a transformation of the human world; that he demands a love of friends and enemies alike and the overcoming of all elements inimical to God and humankind."

Leonardo Boff: *ibid.*, pp. 58,46,60

"If great hopes for the future were awakened in the poor by Jesus' activity, even greater hopes must have been awakened by his prophetic words. But these hopes had originally nothing whatever to do with heaven - at least not as a place of happiness and rewards in the after-life... The good news of the Kingdom of God was news about a future state of affairs on earth, when the poor would no longer be poor, the hungry would be satisfied and the oppressed would no longer be miserable. To say, 'Thy Kingdom come' is the same as saying, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. (Matthew. 6:10)

"Jesus' conviction that the kingdom would come, that man could and would be totally liberated, would have been impossible without his belief in God... For Jesus, the almighty power that achieves the impossible can be called faith. Faith releases within us a power that is beyond us. It was their faith that enabled the sick to be cured and sinners to be released from their sins. So too, it is faith that enables the kingdom to come.

"Jesus was relentless in his endeavours to awaken faith in the kingdom. He felt impelled to go from town to town preaching the good news. To awaken an even more widespread belief

in the kingdom, he instructed disciples and sent them out to preach.. Only when Faith is strong enough in the world will the miracle of the kingdom take place.

"There is a danger here of turning this into a mystique of faith. Faith is not a magical power. It is a straightforward decision in favour of the kingdom of God. The metanoia or change for which Jesus was appealing was a change of mind and heart, a change of loyalty... Transfer your loyalty from one or other of the present kingdoms to the kingdom of God. Make the kingdom of God your priority in life and set all your hopes upon it. It is a hidden treasure or precious pearl; stake everything on it."

Albert Nolan : Jesus before Christianity p.83

#### Compassion

"Jesus experienced the mysterious creative power behind all phenomena as compassion or love... A prophet not only shares God's knowledge, he is filled to the point of bursting with God's own feelings and emotions. In the case of Jesus, it was God's feeling of compassion that possessed and filled him. All his convictions, his faith and his hope were expressions of this fundamental experience. If God is compassionate, then goodness will triumph over evil the impossible will happen and there is hope for mankind. Faith and Hope are the experience of compassion as a divine emotion..

'To believe in Jesus is to believe that goodness can and will triumph over evil. Despite the system, despite the magnitude, complexity and apparent insolubility of our problem today, humankind can be, and in the end, will be liberated.

Every form of evil - sin and all the consequences of sin: suffering, misery, frustration, fear, oppression and injustice - can be overcome. And the only power that can achieve this is the power of a faith that believes this. For faith is, as we have seen, the power of goodness and truth, the power of God."

Albert Nolan : ibid., pp.124 & 140



### Questions for Discussion:

1. How does Jesus define his mission at this public event at the beginning of his ministry?

2. Does this emphasis on the aspect of social justice by Jesus not indicate that he takes the human person as one in which the spiritual is totally integrated in the material? Would you agree with Gutierrez that for Jesus, liberation is total liberation, in which liberation from sin cannot be separated from liberation from injustice? Why or why not?

3. In Luke 7:18-23, John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the expected Messiah:

"John too was informed of all this by his disciples. Summoning two of their number he sent them to the Lord with this message: 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect some other?' The messengers made their way to Jesus and said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to you: he asks, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect some other?' There and then he cured many sufferers from diseases, plagues and evil spirits; and on many blind people he bestowed sight. Then he gave them his answer: 'Go', he said, 'and tell John what you have seen and heard: how the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor are hearing the good news - and happy is the man who does not find me a stumbling block.'

How does Jesus' response here correspond with the text of Luke 4:16 ff?

4. How does Jesus' definition of his mission correspond with the purpose of God discovered in Exodus 6:2-9 and Amos 4:1-3 quoted above?

Besides these three major events, God's concern for the poor is seen in various parts of Sacred Scripture, e.g. Psalms 10, 146; Exodus 20:2, Revelation 7:16.

## Section 2. God identifies with the Poor

The Bible repeatedly shows that the way you treat the poor is an indication of your relationship with God, for he identifies himself with the poor.

Proverbs 19:17

"If you oppress poor people, you insult the God who made them; but kindness shown to the poor is an act of worship."

"When you give to the poor, it is like lending to the Lord, and the Lord will pay you back".

2 Corinthians 8:9

"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as he was, made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty".

The greatest manifestation of this identity was the Incarnation. Through it, he was born poor in a stable, laid in a manger, his first visitors being shepherds, people who were generally regarded as thieves. At the presentation in the temple, pigeons were offered instead of a lamb. He was a refugee to Egypt, then a migrant. He had no home (Matthew 8:20). He sent his disciples in extreme poverty (Luke 9:3, 10:4). His identification with the poor was the sign of his Messiahship (Matthew 11:2-6)

Only as we feel the presence of God in Christ, the poor Galilean, can we understand the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25: 35-40). Then only can we see what it means to see God starving by the roadside and walk by on the other side, as did the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

### The Poor are God's Special Instruments

When God selected a chosen people, he picked poor slaves in Egypt. When He became flesh, he came as a poor Galilean. The early church members were predominantly poor!

## 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

"Now remember what you were, my brothers, when God called you. From the human point of view, few of you were wise or powerful or of high social standing. God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful. He chose what the world despises and looks down on, and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. This means that no one can boast in God's presence".

## James 2:1-6

"My brothers, as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, The Lord of glory, you must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance. Suppose a rich man wearing a gold ring and fine clothes comes to your meeting, and a poor man wearing ragged clothes also comes. If you show more respect to the well-dressed man and say to him, "have this best seat here," but say to the poor man, "stand over there, or sit here on the floor by my feet" then you are guilty of creating distinctions among yourselves and of making judgments based on evil motives. Listen my dear brothers! God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the kingdom which he promised to those who love him. But you dishonour the poor! WHO ARE THE ONES WHO OPPRESS YOU AND DRAG YOU BEFORE THE JUDGES? THE RICH!

There is a sharp contrast between God's procedure and ours. When we want to effect change, we almost always contact people with influence, prestige and power. But, God selected slaves, prostitutes, and other disadvantaged people. Not that he does not use the rich, but we inevitably always rely on such people. This choice points to something significant about the very nature of God.

When reading the texts concerning the rich and poor we wonder whether God is a Marxist! Take, e.g. Luke 1:46-53, (The Magnificat of Mary) echoing Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:2-8. There is a blessing on the poor and a curse on the rich.



Luke 6:20-25

"Jesus looked at his disciples and said:

Happy are you poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours!

Happy are you who are hungry now, you will be filled!

Happy are you who weep now, you will laugh!

How terrible for you who are rich now, you have had your easy life!

How terrible for you who are full now, you will go hungry

How terrible for you who laugh now, you will mourn and weep

How terrible when all people speak well of you; their ancestors said the same thing about the false prophets".

This seems to be a constant theme:

Psalms 107:35-40,42

"He changed deserts into pools of water and dry land into flowing springs. He let hungry people settle there, and they built a city to live in. They sowed the fields and planted grapevines and reaped an abundant harvest....When God's people were defeated and humiliated by cruel oppression and suffering, He showed contempt for their oppressors and made them wander in trackless deserts. But he rescued the needy from the misery. The righteous see this and are glad, but all the wicked are put to silence".

James 5:1

"And now you rich people, listen to me! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming upon you!"

It is important to bear in mind that these texts persistently insist that the wealthy and powerful became such because they oppressed the poor and failed to feed the hungry.

God does not want the division of his people as enemies because of class, but he wants equality. He hates and punishes injustice and neglect of the poor. cf. Luke 16:19 and following : the rich man and Lazarus, Psalms 10, Jeremiah 5:26-29; 22:13-19

God destroys nations as well as individuals because of oppression. cf. Isaiah 3:14-25. As a matter of fact, Sodom was destroyed not only because of its sexual misconduct but its lack of concern for the poor.

If we, Christians, had made God's concern for the poor our concern, we would have changed the world long ago. But it is one thing to accept God's precept with an intellectual faith, believing the word, as it were, and another to put it into practice! Rare are Christians who show Christ's bias to the poor, for example in dinner invitations :

Then Jesus said to his host, When you give a lunch or a dinner...

Luke 14:12-14

Have you ever known a Christian who took Jesus seriously in this? God's concern is constantly put forward to us as a model to imitate:

Do not ill-treat..... Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 15:13-15:

cf. also Deuteronomy 10:17-18; 1 John 3:16-17; James 2:14-17; Luke 6:33-36; Isaiah 1:10-17; Amos 5:21-24

But this does not mean God is partial. He has the same concern for each human being that he has created. However, he is not neutral. He is on the side of the poor because the poor are so thoroughly oppressed by the rich.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. Why does the Bible repeatedly stress that the way one deals with the poor is an indication of one's relationship to God?
2. Is God not being partial by showing his concern for the poor more than for the rich? If this is not being partial, at least it manifests a bias. Why this bias of God? What is his primary concern with regard to our human society?
3. Why, do you think, do Christians not take Jesus seriously in his demand to show a bias towards the poor?

### Section 3. God intervenes in History to exalt the Poor and cast down the Rich

A very constant theme found in the Bible is that God takes the side of the poor and weak and brings down the powerful:

Luke 1 : 52-53

He has brought down monarchs from their thrones,  
but the humble have been lifted high  
The hungry he has satisfied with good things,  
the rich sent empty away.

Questions for Discussion :

1. On the basis of the texts cited below, can you determine how common a biblical theme is the teaching of Luke 1:53?

See in Appendix :

- |                                      |                          |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| #15. 1 Samuel 2:2-8;                 | #16. Job 5:1-16;         |
| #17. Psalms 10:2-18;                 | #18. Psalms 135:5-9;     |
| #19. Proverbs 15:25;                 | #20. Isaiah 1:21-26;     |
| #21. Isaiah 26:5-6;                  | #22. Isaiah 29:17-21;    |
| #23. Ezekiel 34:11-30;               | #24. Job 22:5-9;         |
| #25. Job 23:1-2, 12-13;              | #26. Job 24:1-12, 19-22; |
| #27. Job 29:11-17;                   | #28. Psalms 37:12-15;    |
| #29. Psalms 73:2-20;                 | #30. Psalms 123:3-4;     |
| #31. Proverbs 20:17-21; 21:6; 22:16; | #32. Isaiah 10:10-19;    |
| #33. Ezekiel 22:23-31;               | #34. Hosea 12:7-9;       |
| #35. Amos 8:4-8;                     | Micah 6:9-15 see #12     |
| #36. Habakkuk 2:5-13;                | #37. Ezekiel 22:12.      |

Note: We would suggest that if a group is working on this, these texts be divided among the members of the group. Each member would see whether this theme is brought out clearly in the texts he or she is assigned.

2. Have you realised yourself how often this teaching recurs in the Bible? Do the many rich Christians especially in our city parishes, realise how frequently the Bible teaches this?

3. What is the reason why God casts down the rich and exalts the poor? Does this not indicate a certain neglect of some of the people he himself has created?

Why are the ruling class rich?

Isaiah 3 : 13-25

The Lord comes forward to argue his case  
and stands to judge his people.

The Lord opens the indictment  
against the elders of his people and their officers:

You have ravaged the vineyard,

and the spoils of the poor are in your houses.

Is it nothing to you that you crush my people,  
and grind the faces of the poor?

This is the very word of the Lord, the Lord of Hosts.

Then the Lord said:

Because the women of Zion hold themselves high  
and walk with necks outstretched and wanton glances,

moving with mincing gait

and jingling feet,

the Lord will give the women of Zion bald heads,

the Lord will strip the hair from their foreheads.

In that day the Lord will take away all finery : anklets,  
discs, crescents, pendants, bangles, coronets, head-bands,  
armlets, necklaces, locketts, charms, signets, nose-rings, fine  
dresses, mantles, cloaks, flounced skirts, scarves of gauze,  
kerchiefs of linen, turbans, and flowing veils.

So instead of perfume you shall have the stench of decay  
and a rope in place of a girdle, baldness instead of hair elegantly  
coiled, a loin-cloth of sackcloth instead of a mantle, and branding  
instead of beauty. Your men shall fall by the sword, and your  
warriors in battle.

Jeremiah 5 : 26-29

I saw, and the farm-land was wilderness,  
and the towns all razed to the ground,  
before the Lord in his anger.

These are the words of the Lord:

The whole land shall be desolate,  
though I will not make an end of it.

Therefore the earth will mourn



the heaven above turn black.  
 For I have made known my purpose;  
 I will not relent or change my mind.  
 At the sound of the horsemen and archers  
 the whole country is in flight;  
 they creep into caves, they hide in thickets;  
 they scramble up the crags.  
 Every town is forsaken,  
 no one dwells there.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. Why according to these passages (Isaiah 3:13-25 and Jeremiah 5:27) are the ruling classes rich?
2. What do these passages say about when and how these ruling classes are punished?
3. Do you think that God is at work in history in the same way today? what way do we see any punishment of the oppressors in our society today?
4. How could you explain the difference in God's action in this regard?

We cannot close our eyes to the problem of the apparent injustice prevailing in human society : the powerful do not in any way seem to be punished by God. God does not intervene in the normal working out of the events and situations in our human society, however oppressive and unjust they appear to be. We cannot expect him to intervene continually in the ordinary progress of human history for that would reduce the role of man's free will and reduce human beings to becoming mere puppets in God's hands.

There is injustice in the world, and God wills that this injustice be removed. He still acts to this purpose, but not isolatedly. He acts through those who believe in him. He punishes injustice and liberates the oppressed through us. For, Christ initiated his mission of liberation, but leaves us to continue it. "As the Father has sent me, so do I send you". We continue this mission whenever we give hope to the poor, enable the blind to see, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, visit prisoners, care for the sick, and relieve those who are oppressed. So if the rich and exploiters are not put down from their thrones, not necessarily through violence, and the poor are not exalted, it is not because God is no longer

concerned about justice, but we who are delegated to continue his work, are not fulfilling the responsibility he has entrusted to us.

James 5 : 1-5

Next, a word to you who have great possessions. Weep and wail over the miserable fate descending on you. Your riches have rotted; your fine clothes are moth-eaten; your silver and gold have rusted away, and their very rust will be evidence against you and consume your flesh like fire. You have piled up wealth in an age that is near its close. \*The wages you never paid to the men who mowed your fields are loud against you, and the outcry of the reapers had reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts.\* You have lived on earth in wanton luxury, fattening yourselves like cattle - and the day for slaughter had come. You have condemned the innocent and murdered him; he offers no resistance.

#### Question for Discussion:

This text also says that the rich became rich by oppression. What application does this teaching (especially v.4, marked between \*s) have to the wages paid to persons who produce our rice and wheat, pick our coffee and tea, etc., or who work in our homes as domestic workers?

Ezekiel 16 : 46-50

Your elder sister was Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; your younger sister, who lived with her daughters to the south of you, was Sodom. Did you not behave as they did and commit these same abominations? You came very near to doing even worse than they. As I live, says the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters never behaved as you and your daughters have done. This was the iniquity of your sister Sodom, she and her daughters had pride of wealth and good in plenty, comfort and ease, and yet she never helped the poor and wretched. They grew haughty and did deeds abominable in my sight, and I made away with them as you have seen.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. Does this text accuse the rich of the same evil as the texts from Isaiah 3:13-25 and Jeremiah 5:26-29 ? Is the "sin of oppression" committed by

the people of Sodom judged any differently from the active oppressors condemned in the previous texts in Isaiah, Jeremiah and James?

2. What insights do you get from this text about international exploitation, about the ways in which the industrialised and developed countries deal with the developing or underdeveloped ones?

## Section 4. Christians have a Duty to side with the Oppressed

Like God, all those who believe in him and belong to him must side with the oppressed. The Bible makes it very clear that those who do not side with the oppressed are not really God's people at all.

Proverbs 14 :31

He who oppresses the poor insults his maker;  
he who is generous to the needy honours him.

Ecclesiastes 4 : 1

Again, I considered all the acts of oppression here under the sun, I saw the tears of the oppressed and I saw that there was no one to comfort them. Strength was on the side of the oppressors, and there was no one to avenge them.

Questions for discussion:

1. Proverbs 14:31 is one of a large number of texts which command believers to be on the side of the poor. How does Ecclesiastes 4:1 help to explain why so few people obey this command?
2. Can you see ways in your own life where the same thing happens?

Relation between siding with the oppressed and worship

Isaiah 58 : 1-10

Shout aloud without restraint;  
lift up your voice like a trumpet.  
Call my people to account for their transgression  
and the house of Jacob for their sins

\*although they ask counsel of me day by day  
and say they delight in knowing my ways,  
although, like nations which have acted rightly  
and not forsaken the just laws of their gods,  
they ask me for righteous laws,  
and say they delight in approaching God.\*

Why do we fast, if thou dost not see it?

Why mortify ourselves, if thou payest no heed?

Since you serve your own interest only on your fast day  
and make all your men work the harder,



since your fasting leads only to wrangling and strife,  
 and dashing vicious blows in the fist.  
 on such a day you are keeping no fast.  
 \*\*Is it a fast like this that I require,  
 a day of mortification such as this,  
 that a man should bow his head like a bulrush  
 and make his bed on sack cloth and ashes?  
 Is this what you call a fast,  
 a day acceptable to the Lord?  
 Is not this what I require of you as a fast:  
 to loose the fetters of injustice,  
 to untie the knots of the yoke,  
 to snap every yoke  
 and set free those who have been crushed?  
 Is it not sharing your food with the hungry,  
 taking the homeless poor into your house,  
 clothing the naked when you meet them  
 and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk?\*\*  
 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn  
 and soon you will grow healthy like a wound newly healed.  
 your own righteousness shall be your vanguard  
 and the glory of the Lord your rearguard.  
 Then, if you call, the Lord will answer;  
 if you cry to him, he will say, 'Here I am'.  
 If you cease to pervert justice,  
 to point the accusing finger and lay false charges,  
 if you feed the hungry from your own plenty.  
 and satisfy the needs of the wretched,  
 then your light will rise like dawn out of darkness  
 and your dusk be like noonday.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. How do these people express their religious beliefs? Are these expressions authentically religious? (cf. v.2 marked between \*s)
2. Is it possible to be involved in oppression of the poor and still worship God? Is it necessary for every person who wants to worship God to do the things described in vv. 6-7 marked between \*\*)?
3. In the light of this text, how much of the religious activity and worship

of rich Christians, especially in our cities and towns, becomes a mockery of the God of the poor?

Whenever we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, the simple, central action is the sharing of food, not only eating. That is why Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who was the General of the Jesuits, could say, "As long as there is hunger anywhere in the world, our Eucharist is incomplete everywhere in the world".

"We have sometimes spoken and acted as though the Eucharist had meaning in isolation from the rest of life - as though participation in it guarantees growth in grace independently of the manner in which the participants live their lives in the world. Yet people, who participate reverently and frequently in the Eucharist, but drive hard bargains against the weak, taking advantage of the misfortunes of others to enrich themselves, or preferring the aesthetic pleasure of a 'devout' and serene private life untroubled by the annoyance and struggle of social justice issues, are confronted by the prophetic denunciations of both Testaments, which declare there can be no growth in intimacy with God except by allowing one's life to be disrupted rudely and painfully by the needs of others.

Monica K. Heilweg :The Eucharist and Hunger in the World, p.58.

If members of the Church do not side with the poor and oppressed, they have no part with Christ

Matthew 25 : 31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, \*he will sit in state on his throne, with all the nations gathered before him.\* He will separate men into two groups as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right hand, "You have my Father's blessings. Come, enter and possess the kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made. For when I was hungry, you gave me food, when thirsty, you gave me drink, when I was a stranger, you took me into your home, when naked, you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me". Then the righteous will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and come to visit you? And the king will answer and tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, you did for me, however humble, you did for me".

Then he will say to those on his left hand, "The curse be upon you; go from my sight to the eternal fire that is ready for the devil and his angels. For when I was hungry, you gave me nothing to eat, when thirsty, nothing to drink, when I was a stranger, you gave me no home, when naked, you did not clothe me; when I was ill and in prison, you did not come to my help. And they too will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison and did nothing for you?" And he will answer, "I tell you that anything you did not do for one of these, however humble, you did not do for me." And they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous will enter eternal life".

Questions for Discussion :

1. Is it an exaggeration to say that this text teaches that church members are not Christians at all (regardless of orthodox theology, charismatic

experiences or faithful church attendance) if they do not concern themselves of those in need or side with the poor and oppressed?

2. Who are the people being judged in verse 32 (marked between \*s)? Does thinking about the persons addressed in the parable previous to this one help to find the answer? :

3. "How poor people are treated is a touchstone for the values that inform all our thought, policies and actions. It is central to our Christian faith and to our political challenge" (From A Declaration of Church Action on Poverty, Manchester, 1989). Do you agree with this statement? If so, what are the conclusions that you can draw for your own life?

### Matthew 25:14-30

It is like a man going abroad, who called his servants and put his capital in their hands; to one he gave five bags of gold, to another two, to another one, each according to his capacity. Then he left the country.

The man who had the five bags went at once and employed them in business, and made a profit of five bags, and the man who had the two bags made two. But the man who had been given one bag of gold went off and dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

A long time afterwards, their master returned, and proceeded to settle accounts with them. The man who had been given the five bags of gold came and produced the five he had made: "Master," he said, "you left five bags with me; look, I have made five more." "Well done, my good and trusty servant!" said the master. "You have proved trustworthy in a small way; I will now put you in charge of something big. Come and share your master's delight."

The man with the two bags then came and said, "Master, you left two bags with me; look, I have made two more." "Well done, my good and trusty servant!" said the master. "You have proved trustworthy in a small way; I will now put you in charge of something big. Come and share your master's delight."

Then the man who had been given one bag came and said, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man: you reap where you have not sown, you gather where you have not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your gold in the ground. Here it is -



you have what belongs to you." "You lazy rascal!" said the master. "You know that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered? Then you ought to have put my money on deposit, and on my return I should have got it back with interest. Take the bag of gold from him, and give it to the one with the ten bags. For the man who has will always be given more, till he has enough and to spare; and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has. Fling the useless servant out into the dark, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth!"

3. Some interpreters think that this passage as well as the one immediately quoted below (1 John 3:17) only commands concern for poor Christians. Does the second passage which follows (Matthew 5:43-48) permit or require us to extend the meaning of Matthew 25 to all the poor everywhere?

a. 1 John 3:17

It is by this that we know what love is : that Christ laid down his life for us. And we in our turn are bound to lay down our lives for our brothers. But if a man has enough to live on, and yet when he sees his brother in need, shuts up his heart against him, how can it be said that the divine love dwells in him?

b. Matthew 5:43-48

You have learned that they were told, "Love your neighbour, hate your enemy." But what I tell you is this: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest. If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? Surely the tax-gatherers do as much as that. And if you greet only your brothers, what is extraordinary about that? Even the heathen do as much. There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds.

4. What would be the impact of this parable on your own lives? In other words, how would you change your life if you truly believed that aiding the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned (imprisoned because they were really guilty, not because imprisoned though innocent!) meant

serving Jesus himself, and that neglecting the poor meant turning away from the incarnate Son of God lying naked, starving or sick on the roadside, or languishing in prison?

### Hungry, Lonely, and Cold

"When I was lonely,  
You left me alone.  
When I was homeless,  
You preached to me about the shelter of God's love.  
When I was hungry,  
You formed a humanity's club and discussed my hunger.  
When I was naked,  
You debated about the morality of my nakedness.  
When I was in prison,  
You guiltily crept into a cellar and prayed for my release.  
When I was sick,  
You fell on your knees and thanked God for your health.  
You seem to be so Holy,  
so close to God,  
But I'm still hungry, lonely and cold"

President Canaan Banana: The Gospel  
according to the Ghetto, p.19

## Section 5. Jubilee Economics and Redistribution of Wealth

### Economic Relations among the People of God

The concern that the People of God had for the poor was manifested by the various rules they had for economic relationships. The most striking of these was the Jubilee principle. Leviticus 25 is one of the most radical texts we can find in the Bible. According to it, every fifty years all land was to return to its original owners - without compensation. We might remark that Deuteronomy 15 is an idealistic statement of God's perfect demand and also a realistic reference to Israel's probable performance with regard to debts.

"The poor are always with us" because sinful society will always produce poor people! Besides injustice and exploitation, physical handicap, death, lack of natural ability may have led to some people becoming poor, hence God gave a law to equalise the situation. Private property was not abolished, but the means of production were to be equalised regularly. The reason: the land is God's. A trumpet blast announcing the Jubilee sounded on the Day of Atonement. Reconciliation with God is a precondition to reconciliation with one's brothers and sisters. Conversely, genuine reconciliation with God leads inevitably to transformation of all other relationships.

Another means of regularising economic relations was the Sabbatical Year.

Every seven years land was to lie fallow for the poor to gather freely and eat. (Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 25:2-7.)

At this time, Hebrew slaves received their freedom (Deuteronomy 15:12-18, Leviticus 25:39-49),

- together with proceeds of their labours! (Deuteronomy 15:12-14; Exodus 23:2-6)

All loans and debts were cancelled! (Deuteronomy 15:1-6,9-10)

Failure to observe the sabbatical law was one reason for the Babylonian exile. (2 Chronicles 36:20-21; Leviticus 26:35-36)

The laws of tithing and gleaning were also regulations to enable the poor to share in the economic benefits of the country. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 26:12-15; Numbers 18:21-32; Ruth 2.)

The rich were urged to leave generous gleanings in memory of their own poverty and oppression when they were slaves in Egypt. The recollection of their own sufferings was always the motive force of their justice and sharing. (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)

Much of this awareness of the obligation of sharing the produce of the earth is reflected in Christian writing. These startling words of St. Basil are an example:

"When someone steals a man's clothes we call him a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the man who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the man who has no shoes. (Homily on Luke, PG 31, col 277.)

St. Ambrose too, supports the just claims of the poor when he says, "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor. You are handing over what is his."

#### Leviticus 25 : 8-28

You shall count seven sabbaths of years, that is seven times seven years, forty-nine years, and in the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, on the Day of Atonement, you shall send it through all your land to sound a blast, and so you shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberation in the land for all its inhabitants. You shall make this your year of jubilee. Every man of you shall return to his patrimony, every man to his family. The fiftieth year shall be your jubilee. You shall not sow, and you shall not harvest the self-sown crop, nor shall you gather in the grapes from the unpruned vines, because it is a jubilee, to be kept holy by you. You shall eat the produce direct from the land.

In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to his patrimony. When you sell or buy land amongst yourselves, neither party shall drive a hard bargain. You shall pay your fellow-countryman according to the number of annual crops. The more years there are to run, the higher the price, the fewer the years, the lower, because he is selling you a series of crops. You must not victimise one another but you shall fear your God,



because I am the Lord your God. Observe my statutes, keep my judgements and carry them out; and you shall live in the land of security. The land shall yield its harvest; you shall eat your fill and live there secure.

If you ask what you are to eat during the seventh year, seeing that you will neither sow nor gather the harvest, I will ordain my blessing for you in the sixth year and the land shall produce a crop to carry over three years. When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating from the earlier crop; you shall eat the old until the new crop is gathered in the ninth year.

\*No land shall be sold outright, because the land is mine, and you are coming into it as aliens and settlers.  
\*\*Throughout the whole land of your patrimony, you shall not allow land which has been sold to be redeemed.

When one of you is reduced to poverty and sells part of his patrimony, his next-of-kin who has the duty of redemption shall come and redeem what his kinsman has sold. When a man has no such next-of-kin and himself becomes able to afford it, redemption, he shall take into account the years since the sale and pay the purchaser the balance up to the jubilee. Then he may return to his patrimony. But if the man cannot afford to buy back the property, it shall remain in the hands of the purchaser till the year of jubilee. It shall then revert to the original owner, and he shall return to his patrimony.\*\*

### Questions for Discussion :

1. Every fifty years, all land is to go back to the original owners - and without compensation! Why did God give this command to his people?
2. What is the theological basis for restoration of land after fifty years? (see verse 23, marked between \*s)
3. What is the basic 'capital' in an agricultural society?
4. Why does God give this regular mechanism of redistribution every fifty years rather than merely depend on the charitable inclinations of the rich?
5. Does this passage teach that the right of the original owner to have the means to earn a living is a higher right than the right of the person with enough money to buy the land? (cf. vv. 24-28 marked between \*\*s)

6. How does this text show that God is opposed to extremes of wealth and poverty?

7. What is the significance of the fact that the year of restoration began on the day of atonement?

8. Are there any appropriate contemporary applications to this jubilee passage in the Church and in secular society? The Catholic Church celebrates a "Jubilee Year" from time to time. Is there any connection or similarity of this Jubilee year with the Jubilee year described in the text of Leviticus 25?

9. What would an economic system in today's society look like which was designed with this Jubilee passage as a fundamental clue to God's will for the economic sphere? Could it be a socialism as spelt out in the Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Nicaragua quoted in Chapter 3 in the section on "Socialism and Christianity"? What are the reasons for your answer?

10. Is the basic intent of the legislation on the sabbatical year, tithing, harvesting and interest as seen in the passages indicated below similar to that of Leviticus 25?

See in Appendix:

#38. Exodus 23:10-11;

#40. 2 Chronicles 36:17-21;

#42. Jeremiah 34:8-17;

#44. Leviticus 27:30-32;

#46. Deuteronomy 26:12-13;

#48. Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22;

#50. Exodus 22:21-27;

#52. Nehemiah 5:1-12;

#39. Deuteronomy 15:1-15;

#41. Nehemiah 10:28-31;

#43. Genesis 28:20-22;

#45. Deuteronomy 14:22-29;

#47. Luke 11:42;

#49. Ruth 2:1-9;

#51. Deuteronomy 23:19-20;

#53. Psalms 15:1-5.

(Note: If a group works on these questions, these texts can be divided among the members who will find the the answer from the texts assigned to them and present this to the whole group.)

11. According to this text of Leviticus 25, the right to resources necessary to earn a living is a higher right than the right to private property. What are the implications for the distribution of natural resources of the First World? of our own country?

## Section 6. In the New Community of Jesus' Followers

### Jesus' New Community

Economic relations in the new community of Christ's followers were a powerful sign of the kingdom of love and justice that he came to inaugurate on earth. Jesus' disciples shared a common purse. Judas administered a common fund. The women who travelled with them also shared financial resources. It is in this specific context, that Jesus' words take on a realistic meaning :

Matthew 19:21

If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven;

Mark 10:28-31

Yes, and I tell you that anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel, will receive much more in this present age ... and persecutions as well; and in the age to come he will receive eternal life.

It seems that Jesus was naive to promise that those who gave up everything would receive a hundred times as much in this present age. Actually this promise is related to the above-stated fact that, like the members of the early church, his disciples probably engaged in economic sharing so that the resources of one were available to others as had any need. If the Church were really living that way today, Jesus' words would not seem so naive and visionary. Christ's teachings about settling disputes outside court, about cutting off eye, hand, etc., if cause of scandal, as well as about divorce and vows are best understood in the context of a new social order in which Christ's followers were completely available to each other.

The massive economic sharing of the earliest Christians is indisputable, if we go by the texts of the Acts of the Apostles which are quoted below. These texts also show that the evangelism impact of this sharing was striking. See especially Acts 2:47 and 4:33.

A non-Christian philosopher, Aristides, writing in 125 AD to the Emperor Hadrian about the early Christians had this to say:

Christians love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who hate them. If a man has something, he gives freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger, Christians take him home and they are happy. They do not consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God.

"And if they hear one of them is in jail, or persecuted for professing the name of their redeemer, they all give him what he needs. If it is possible, they bail him out.

"If one of them is poor and there isn't enough food to go around, they fast several days to give him the food he needs ... This is really a new kind of person. There is something divine in them."

### The Marks of the Early Church

Because of this economic sharing, which was an essential feature of the community spirit of the early Church, there were a number of characteristics which marked the early Christian communities:

- "1. In the early Church there was friction but no faction.
2. The early believers differed in their views but were united in their vision.
3. In the early Church, peace took precedence over prestige.
4. There was no competition, but there was cooperation.
5. Leaders were more 'cause-conscious' than 'credit-conscious'
6. Rightness was stressed over against rights.
7. The early Church was courteous but not compromising."

Quoted from "St. Stephen's Calling", Parish bulletin of St. Stephen's Church, Bombay, February 1981.

Acts 2 : 41-47

Then those who accepted his word were baptised, and some three thousand were added to their numbers that day.



They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and share the common life, to break bread, and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere, and many marvels and signs were brought about through the apostles. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required. With one mind they kept up their daily attendance at the temple, and, breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy, as they praised God and enjoyed the favour of the whole people. \*And day by day the Lord added to their number those whom he was saving.\*

Acts 4 : 32-35

The whole body of believers was united in heart and soul. Not a man of them claimed any of his possessions as his own, but everything was held in common, \*\*while the apostles bore witness with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.\*\* They were all held in high esteem; for they had never seen a needy person among them, because all who had property of land or houses sold it, brought the proceeds of the sale, and laid the money at the feet of the apostles; it was then distributed to any who stood in need.

Questions for Discussion :

1. What were the specific aspects of Christian fellowship? in other words, what did this Christian fellowship specifically mean for the early body of believers?
2. What was the extent of their economic sharing? We must bear in mind that most of the early Christians were awaiting an immediate second coming of Christ. This seems to be indicated in the letter of James : "Ye have piled up wealth in an age that is near its close." (James 5:3) The members of the early Church therefore did not see any need to keep hold on material possessions for themselves. In this context, could we say that their sharing was too extensive for imitation in our present times?
3. The testimony of Aristides, a non-Christian shows what was the image Christians had among the non-Christians. What is the image they have of us today in India? What is the image of a Christian as depicted in

non-Christian literature, in films, etc.? Why is this so? To what extent are we Christians responsible for such an image? What can be done to change it?

4. What Christian fellowship <sup>should</sup> ~~should~~ mean for us today?

5. What was the evangelical impact of this economic sharing? (see Acts 2:47 marked in the first text between \*s, as well as Acts 6:7:

The word of God now spread more and more widely; the number of disciples in Jerusalem went on increasing rapidly, and very many of the priests adhered to the Faith.

6. What therefore should you say about the relationship between economic sharing, or working for the development and liberation of others on the one hand and evangelisation on the other?

### Economic sharing of Jesus' disciples

Luke 8 : 1-3

After this he went journeying from town to town and village to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. With him were the Twelve and a number of women who had been set free from evil spirits and infirmities; Mary, known as Mary of Magdala, from whom seven devils had come out, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, a steward of Herod's, Susanna, and many others. These women provided for them out of their own resources.

### Questions for discussion:

1. What instances of economic sharing among Jesus' disciples are there in the Gospels?

2. Would the dramatic economic sharing described in Acts 2 and 4 have been an extension of what Jesus had already begun among his disciples?

Giving up everything to receive hundredfold in this present age!

Mark 10:28-31

At this Peter spoke. 'We here', he said, 'have left everything to become your followers'. Jesus said, 'I tell you this: there is no one who has given up home, brothers or sisters, mother, father or children, or land, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will

not receive in this age a hundred times as much - how brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and land - persecutions besides; and in the age to come eternal life. many who are first will be last and the last first'.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. Was Jesus too simple to promise that those who give up everything to follow him will receive a hundred times as much in this present age? In what way is this promise being realised?
2. Is this promise found in this text of Mark related to the fact that the disciples of Jesus, during his lifetime and in the early church were probably engaged in economic sharing so that the resources of one were available to others who had any need?
3. If the church were today really living that way today, would Jesus' words seem so naive and unrealistic? Is this economic sharing realistic in our present times? If we sold all we had, who would buy it? To what benefit would this be in the long run? What, therefore, could be a practical and realistic application of this sharing today?
4. How might economic relationships today within the Christian community be remodelled along the lines of Leviticus 25 (see above section 5) and Acts 2 and Acts 4? If they were, would the church be able to present a new model of economic sharing that would be relevant to a world desperately divided between rich and poor?

## Section 7. The Early Christians set an Example of Sharing

### 2 Corinthians 8 : 1-15

We must tell you, friends, about the grace of generosity which God has imparted to our congregations in Macedonia. The troubles they have been through have tried them hard, yet in all this they have been so exuberantly happy that from the depths of their poverty they have shown themselves lavishly open-handed. Going to the limit of their resources, as I can testify, and even beyond that limit, they begged us most insistently, and on their own initiative, to be allowed to share in this generous service to their fellow-Christians. And their giving surpassed our expectations; for they gave their very selves, offering them in the first instance to the Lord, but also, under God, to us. The upshot is that we have asked Titus, who began it all, to visit you and bring this work of generosity also to completion.

You are so rich in everything - in faith, speech, knowledge, and zeal of every kind, as well as in the loving regard you have for us - surely you should show yourselves equally lavish in this generous service! This is not meant as an order; by telling you how keen others are I am putting your love to the test. \*For you know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been: he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.\*

Here is my considered opinion on the matter. What I ask you to do is in your own interests. You made a good beginning last year both in the work you did and in your willingness to undertake it. Now I want you to go on and finish it: be as eager to complete the scheme as you were to adopt it, and give according to your means. \*\*Provided there is an eager desire to give, God accepts what a man has; he does not ask for what he has not. There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality. At the moment your surplus meets their need, but one day your need may be met from their surplus. The aim is equality as Scripture has it, 'The man who got much had no more than enough, and the man who got little did not go short'.\*\*



## Questions for Discussion :

1. Why does Paul appeal to the example of Jesus? (see text between \*s)
2. What are the guidelines Paul lays down for giving? (see text between \*\*s) Note: The Revised Standard Version has a more literal translation of the original Greek: "As a matter of equality, your abundance at the present time should supply their want so that (later) their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality")
3. How does Paul's quotation from Exodus 16:18 (in the last verse) help explain his meaning?
4. Is there any significance in the fact that this Pauline collection (unlike the sharing in the Jerusalem church in one locality) was taken in Europe for Christians in Asia?
5. How far should the guidelines laid down by Paul for economic equality be applied today in the world-wide body of Christian believers?
6. By this offering from non-Jewish Christians to Jewish Christians, Paul meant to bring in an idea of reconciliation. How could similar sharing be an action of reconciliation today? in the world? in India? Is there a possibility of a similar sharing between the various rites and denominations?
7. Can you see a consistent pattern in the various biblical passages on economic sharing among the people of God such as :

### See in Appendix :

- |                                     |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| #54. Numbers 26:52-56;              | #38. Exodus 23:10-11;       |
| #39. Deuteronomy 15:1-15;           | #40. 2 Chronicles 36:17-21; |
| #41. Nehemiah 10:28-31;             | #42. Jeremiah 34:8-17;      |
| #43. Genesis 28:20-22;              | #44. Leviticus 27:30-32;    |
| #45. Deuteronomy 14:22-29;          | #46. Deuteronomy 26:12-13;  |
| #48. Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22;      | #49. Ruth 2:1-9             |
| #50. Exodus 22:21-27;               | #51. Deuteronomy 23:19-20;  |
| #52. Nehemiah 5:1-12;               | #53. Psalms 15:1-5;         |
| #55. Luke 11:1-2;                   | #56. Deuteronomy 24:19-22;  |
| #57. Matthew 5:13-16;               | #58. Matthew 6:1-4;         |
| #59. Mark 10:28-31, 35-45;          | #60. Mark 15:40-41;         |
| #61. Luke 8:1-3;                    | #62. Luke 22:14-20;         |
| #63. John 12:6; 13:1-17, 29, 34-35; | #64. Acts 2:41-47;          |
| #65. Acts 4:32-37;                  | #66. Acts 6:1-7;            |
| #67. Acts 11:27-30;                 | #68. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4;  |
| #69. Acts 21:10-14;                 | #70. Acts 24:10-17;         |

- #71. Romans 15:25-29;
- #73. 2 Corinthians 9:1-15;
- #75. Romans 12:9-13;
- #77. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 13:1-7;
- #79. 2 Corinthians 11:27-29;
- #81. 1 Timothy 5:9-10;
- #83. James 2:1-9.
- #72. 2 Corinthians 8:1-15;
- #74. Galatians 2:7-10;
- #76. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17;
- #78. 2 Corinthians 1:3-7;
- #80. Galatians 6:9-10;
- #82. Hebrews 13:1-3;

Note: It would be extremely useful if the group allocated a number of these texts to each member, who would later on, after due study, present to the group the findings on this pattern of economic sharing among God's people.

## Section 8. Material Abundance can be a Good but Dangerous Gift

Ecclesiastes 9 : 7

Go to it then, eat your food and enjoy it, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for already God has accepted what you have done.

Questions for Discussion :

1. What is the biblical attitude towards creation?

See a. 1 Timothy 4:4-5 :

For everything that God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected when it is taken with thanksgiving, since it is hallowed by God's own word and by prayer.

b. Genesis 1:11-12, 20-22

Then God said, 'Let the earth produce fresh growth, let there be on the earth plants bearing seed, fruit-trees bearing fruit each with seed according to its kind.' So it was; the earth yielded fresh growth, plants bearing seed according to their kind and trees bearing fruit each with seed according to its kind; and God saw that it was good.

2. How does this text reflect the biblical attitude towards creation?
3. What is the biblical orientation towards asceticism or the practice of self-denial and abstinence from unnecessary comforts and pleasures?

Matthew 6 : 24-34

\*\*'No servant can be the slave of two masters; for either he will hate the first and love the second, or he will be devoted to the first and think nothing of the second. You cannot serve God and Money.\*\*

'Therefore I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive, and clothes to cover your body. Surely life is more than food, the body more than clothes. \*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You are worth more than the birds! Is there a man of you who by anxious thought can add a foot to his height?\* And why be anxious about clothes? Consider how the lilies grow in the fields; they do not spin; and yet, I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendour

was not attired like one of these. \*But if that is how God clothes the grass in the fields, which is there today, and tomorrow is thrown on the stove, will he not all the more clothe you?\* How little faith you have! No, do not ask anxiously, "what are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear?" All these are things for the heathen to run after, not for you, because your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. \*\*Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well.\*\* So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles of its own.

#### . Questions for Discussion

1. What is the secret of this carefree attitude towards material possessions?
2. How might the absence of this carefree attitude reflect a lack of faith or unbelief? (see the two texts marked between \*s) or an unwillingness to place all our faith and trust in Jesus, as the Master of our lives? (see the two texts marked between \*\*s)
3. How would the carefree attitude towards material possessions which Jesus advocates make us better able to work against misery and injustice today?

#### Matthew 19:16-26

And now a man came up and asked him, 'Master, what good must I do to gain eternal life?' 'Good?' said Jesus. 'Why do you ask me about this? One alone is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments'. 'Which commandments?' he asked. Jesus answered. 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery; do not steal, do not give false evidence, honour your father and mother; and love your neighbour as yourself'. The young man answered, 'I have kept all these. Where do I still fall short?' Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to go to the whole way, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and then you will have riches in heaven; and come, follow me'. When the young man heard this, he went away with a heavy heart; for he was a man of great wealth.

\*Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you this, a rich man will find it hard to enter the kingdom of Heaven. I repeat, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich



man to enter the kingdom of God'.\* The disciples were amazed to hear this. 'Then who can be saved?' they asked. Jesus looked at them, and said, 'For men this is impossible, but everything is possible for God'.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. Why are material possessions so dangerous?
2. Do you think that even 1% of the well-to-do Christians in our parishes in India, or in the world, for that matter, actually believe Jesus' statement in vv. 23-24? (see text between \*s)
3. If they did, what would they do?
4. How widespread in the Bible, especially in the New Testament is Jesus' attitude towards possessions?
5. If they follow the teachings of Jesus, most Christians, if not all, ought to live according to a more simple lifestyle. Why should they do so? Is it because simple living is in itself better or because self-denial is necessary while millions of our countrymen are existing in misery below the poverty line?
6. Is our own lifestyle a witness to our belief in this teaching of Jesus?

## Section 9. Doing the Will of God and Material Abundance

Some people, especially those who are well-to-do, seem to accept the view that those who do the will of God and observe his commandments are blessed with wealth and comfort. But, it is really so that material abundance is the result of obedience to God's Will?

### Proverbs 6 : 6-11

Go to the ant, you sluggard, watch her ways and get wisdom. She has no overseer, no governor or ruler. but in summer she prepares her store of food and lays in her supplies at harvest. How long, you sluggard, will you lie abed? When will you rouse yourself from sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands in rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, want like a ruffian.

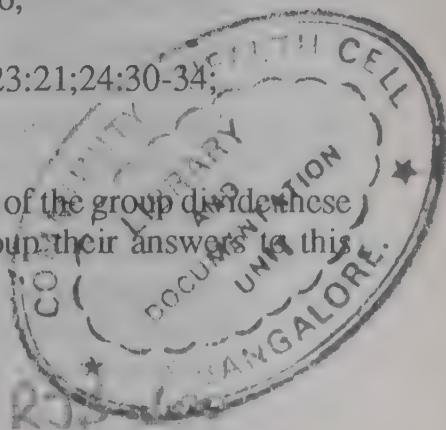
### Questions for Discussion :

1. Is poverty sometimes due to laziness?
2. What is the significance of the fact that the Bible far more frequently links poverty with oppression rather than with laziness? See the following texts for the confirmation of this:

See in Appendix :

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| #24. Job 22:5-9;   | #25. Job 23:1-2,12-13;               |
| #26. Job 24:1-12, 19-22;   | #27. Job 29:11-17;                   |
| #28. Psalms 37:12-15;  | #29. Psalms 73:2-20;                 |
| #30. Psalms 123:3-4;   | #31. Proverbs 20:17-21; 21:6; 22:16; |
| #32. Isaiah 10:10-19;  | #33. Ezekiel 22:23-31;               |
| #34. Hosea 12:7-9;   | #35. Amos 8:4-8;                     |
| #12. Micah 6:9-15;   | #36. Habakkuk 2:5-12;                |
| #37. Ezekiel 22:12;  | #84. James 5:1-6;                    |
| #85. 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 10-12;                                 |                                      |
| #86. Proverbs 10:11; 11:26; 13:4; 14:23; 20:13; 23:21; 24:30-34; |                                      |
| 29:7;  |                                      |
| #87. 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13.                                    |                                      |

Note: Here again, we suggest that the members of the group divide these texts among themselves and report to the group their answers to this question.



Psalm 128 : 1-4

Happy are all who fear the Lord,  
who live according to his will.  
You shall eat fruit of your own labours,  
you shall be happy and you shall prosper.  
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine  
in the heart of your house;  
your sons shall be like olive-shoots  
round about your table.  
This is the blessing in store for the man  
who fears the Lord.

Questions for Discussion :

1. Why does God reward obedience to his will with material abundance? Does he always do that?
2. In our country, it seems that virtue and goodness are always at the losing end. Why is it so?
3. What would the universe be like if oppression and domination were regularly rewarded and virtue and goodness were regularly penalised? To prevent this from happening, what is the mission of each and every Christian?
4. How do you react to the all pervading practice of bribery, corruption, capitation fees, etc. Do you fall in line with it or do you try to fight against it? Can an individual succeed in such a fight? What can you as a group do about it?

Psalm 112 : 1-5.9

\* O praise the Lord.

Happy is the man who fears the Lord  
and finds great joy in his commandments.  
His descendants shall be the mightiest in the land,  
a blessed generation of good men.\*  
His house shall be full of wealth and riches;  
righteousness shall be his for ever,  
He is gracious, compassionate, good,  
a beacon in darkness for honest men.  
It is right for a man to be gracious in his lending,  
to order his affairs with judgement.  
He gives freely to the poor;

righteousness shall be his forever;  
in honour he carries his head high.

### Proverbs 28 : 27

He who gives to the poor will never want,  
but he who turns a blind eye gets nothing but curses.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. How do these texts provide a criterion for knowing whether one's abundance is the result of oppression or of obedience to His will which God has rewarded?

2. As indicated in Psalm 112:1-2, (marked between \*s) the obedient person obeys God's command. Many biblical passages demonstrate that one of God's most frequent command is to have concern for the poor :

See in Appendix :

- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| #88. Proverbs 14:21;   | #89. Exodus 22:21-24;             |
| #90. Exodus 23:9-12;   | #91. Deuteronomy 24:17-18; 27:19; |
| #92. Psalms 41:12;   | #93. Psalms 72:1-4, 12-14; 73     |
| #94 Psalms 82:1-5;   |                                   |
| #95. Proverbs 14:31; 21:13; 22:9,22; 23:10-11; 29:7; 31:8-9; |                                   |
| #96. Ecclesiastes 4:1;                                       | #97. Isaiah 32:5-8;               |
| #98. Isaiah 33:14-16;  | #99. Jeremiah 21:11-12;           |
| #100. Luke 11:37-41;   | #101. Luke 12:32-34;              |
| #102. Luke 14:12-14;   | #103. Luke 19:1-10;               |
| #104. Acts 9:36-41;  | #105. Ephesians 4:28;             |
| #106. James 1:27;  | #107. Isaiah 1:10-17;             |
| #108. Isaiah 48:1-20;  | #109. Matthew 25:31-46;           |
| #110. Luke 3:7-11;   | #111. Luke 20:45-47;              |
| #112. James 2:14-17;   | #113. 1 John 3:16-18;             |
| #114. 1 John 4:7-8;  | #115. Matthew 5:43-48;            |
| #116. Deuteronomy 10:17-19;#117. Exodus 23:1-3;              |                                   |
| #118. Job 34:17-19;  | #119. Romans 1:14-16.             |

In the context of these passages, can we say that those who do not have any concern for the poor could be certain that their material abundance is the reward that God has given them for their obedience to his will?

Note: Divide these texts among the members of the group to study and report to the group their answer to this question.



3. Can one give generously enough to the needy at a time when so many millions in our country are still living in inhuman conditions, without ever having a single square meal a day, all the days of their lives. when they have no decent roof to protect them against the rain, the sun and the cold?

4. Is this giving to be through one's own self-sacrifice or is it justified to give generously only when one gets money from an organisation, like a development resource agency or the Vincent de Paul Society, or a similar charitable institution or organisation?

## Section 10. Justice is What God wills for His People

### Psalm 94 : 1-15

O Lord, thou God of vengeance,  
thou God of vengeance, show thyself.  
Rise up, judge of the earth;  
punish the arrogant as they deserve.  
How long shall the wicked, O Lord,  
how long shall the wicked exult?  
Evildoers are full of bluster,  
boasting and swaggering;  
they beat down thy people, O Lord,  
and oppress thy chosen nation;  
they murder the widow and the stranger  
and do the fatherless to death;  
they say, 'The Lord does not see,  
the God of Jacob pays no heed'.  
Pay heed yourselves, more brutish of the people;  
you fools, when will you be wise?  
Does he that planted the ear not hear,  
he that moulded the eye not see?  
Shall not he that instructs the nations correct them?  
The teacher of mankind, has he no knowledge?  
The Lord knows the thoughts of man,  
that they are but a puff of wind.  
Happy the man whom thou dost instruct, O Lord,  
and teach out of thy law,  
giving him respite from adversity  
until a pit is dug for the wicked,  
The Lord will not abandon his people  
nor forsake his chosen nation;  
for righteousness still informs his judgement,  
and all upright men follow it.

Questions for discussion:

1. What does this passage tell us about the nature of justice?
2. What can we learn from it about the immediate success of injustice and its success or failure in the long run?

3. How does a biblical faith provide the necessary hope for the long and costly struggle for justice?

Exodus 23 : 6-8

You shall not deprive the poor man of justice in his suit.  
Avoid all lies, and do not cause the death of the innocent and the guiltless; for I, the Lord, will never acquit the guilty.  
You shall not accept a bribe, for bribery makes the discerning man blind and the just man a crooked answer.

Proverbs 13 : 23

Untilled land might yield food enough for the poor, but even that may be lost through injustice.

Questions for discussion :

1. How do these texts give us a clearer idea of what justice is? 2. Can you think of any contemporary illustrations of Proverbs 13:23? Explain some of them. The question asked in section 9 in the discussion on Psalm 128 :1-4 about bribery, corruption, etc., is again relevant here.

Matthew 5 : 17-20

'Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened. If any man therefore sets aside even the least of the Law's demands, and teaches others to do the same, he will have the lowest place in the kingdom of Heaven, whereas anyone who keeps the Law, and teaches others so, will stand high in the kingdom of Heaven. I tell you, unless you show yourselves far better men than the Pharisees and the doctors of the law, you can never enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Questions for discussion :

1. What does this text say to those who suggest that Jesus had little concern for justice?
2. From all the texts you have been able to reflect on and discuss until now, what do you think is the importance given by the Law, both in the Old and New Testaments, to the concern for justice?
3. "There can be no true love, unless it is founded on justice". Discuss.



**Section 11.** Systematic Injustice and Legalised Oppression  
constitute the worst of sins

Isaiah 5 : 8-16, 22-24

\*Shame on you! you who add house to house  
and join field to field.  
until not an acre remains,  
and you are left to dwell alone in the land.\*

The Lord of Hosts has sworn in my hearing:  
Many houses shall go to ruin;  
fine large houses shall be uninhabited.  
Five acres of vineyard shall yield only a gallon,  
and ten bushels of seed only return a peck.

Shame on you! you who rise early in the morning  
to go in pursuit of liquor  
and draw out the evening inflamed with wine,  
at whose feasts there are harp and lute,  
tabor and pipe and wine,

who have no eyes for the work of the Lord.  
and never see the things that he has done.

Therefore my people are dwindling away  
all unawares;  
the nobles are starving to death,  
and the common fold die of thirst,

Therefore Sheol gapes with straining throat  
and has opened her measureless jaws:  
down go nobility and common people,  
their noisy bustling mob.

Mankind is brought low, men are humbled,  
humbled are the haughty looks.

But the Lord of Hosts sits high in judgement,  
and by righteousness the Holy God shows himself holy.

Shame on you! you mighty toppers, valiant mixers of drink,  
who for a bribe acquit the guilty  
and deny justice to those in the right.

## Questions for Discussion :

1. Is there any indication that the sin described in v.8 (marked between \*s) is illegal? Is not injustice often legal in our present times and society? Give some examples of this legal injustice that you can find in our laws, and even in our Indian Constitution?
2. What different kinds of sins are condemned in these verses?
3. Are personal sins like alcoholism more or less sinful than participation in structural sins like economic oppression? Why?
4. Amos 2:6-8 says:

These are the words of the Lord:

For crime after crime of Israel

I will grant them no reprieve,  
because they sell the innocent for silver  
and the destitute for a pair of shoes.

They grind the heads of the poor into the earth  
and thrust the humble out of their way.

Father and son resort to the same girl,  
to the profanation of my holy name.

Men lie down besides every altar  
on garments seized in pledge,  
and in the house of their God they drink liquor  
got by way of fines.

How does this text of Amos reflect the same teaching as Isaiah 5:8-16?

5. What structural sin do the rich and wealthier people of our country participate in today whether consciously or unconsciously?

Isaiah 10 : 1-4

Shame on you! you who make unjust laws and punish burdensome decrees, depriving the poor of justice, robbing the weakest of my people of their rights, despoiling the widow and plundering the orphan. What will you do when called to account, when ruin from afar confronts you? To whom will you flee for help and where will you leave your children, so that they do not cower before the goaler or fall by the executioner's hand? For all this his anger has not turned back, and his hand is stretched out still.

## Questions for Discussion :

1. How does this text add to our understanding of structural sin ? See also Psalms 94:21-23 :

For they put the righteous on trial for his life  
and condemn to death innocent men.  
But the Lord has been my strong tower  
and God my rock of refuge;  
our God requites the wicked for their injustice,  
the Lord puts them to silence for their misdeeds.

## Section 12. How God reacts towards Injustice

Micah 3:1-4, 9-103

And I said:

Listen, you leaders of Jacob, rulers of Israel,  
should you not know what is right?

You hate good and love evil,  
you flay men alive and tear the very flesh from  
their bones

you devour the flesh of my people,  
strip off their skin,  
splinter their bones;

you shred them like flesh into a pot,  
like meat into a cauldron.

Then they will call to the Lord, and he will give them  
no answer

When that time comes he will hide his face from them,  
so wicked are their deeds.

Listen to this, leaders of Jacob, rulers of Israel,  
you who make justice hateful  
and wrest it from its straight course,  
building Zion in bloodshed  
and Jerusalem in iniquity.

Questions for Discussion :

1. What does the emotion in this passage convey about the depth of God's passion for justice? Should we feel as deeply? Why?
2. What kinds of injustice are condemned here?
3. In what different ways does God intend to punish them?

See a. Amos 8:11-12

The time is coming says the Lord God,  
when I will send famine on the land,  
not hunger for bread or thirst for water,  
but for hearing the word of the Lord.  
Men shall stagger from north to south,  
they shall range from east to west,  
seeking the word of the Lord,



but they shall not find it.

b. Jeremiah 12 : 7

I have forsaken the house of Israel,

I have cast off my own people.

I have given my beloved into the power of her foes.

My own people have turned on me like a lion from the scrub

c. Amos 6:7

Now, therefore,

you shall head the column of exiles;

that will be the end of sprawling and revelry.

4. What is the attitude of the "religious establishment" or of institutionalised religion to the injustice prevalent in our socio-economic system?

5. Would this apply also to the institutionalised church? Why or Why not?

See Amos 7 : 10-17.

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, reported to Jeroboam, king of Israel: 'Amos is conspiring against you in Israel; the country cannot tolerate what he is saying. He says "Jeroboam shall be cut off by the sword, and Israel shall be deported far from their native land." ' To Amos himself Amaziah said, 'Be off, you seer! Come with you to Judah! You can earn your living and do your prophesying there. But never prophesy against Bethel, for that is the king's sanctuary, a royal place.' 'I am no prophet', Amos replied to Amaziah, 'nor am I a prophet's son; I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore-figs. But the Lord took me as a shepherd, I followed the flock and said to me "Go and prophesy to the people Israel." So now listen to the word of the Lord. You tell me I am not to prophesy against Israel or go drivelling on against the people of Isaac. Now these are the words of the Lord: Your wife shall become a city strumpet and your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword. Your land shall be divided up with a measuring-line, you yourself shall die in a heathen country, and Israel shall be deported far from their native land and go into exile.'

4. What examples of this attitude towards injustice of the institutional church can you think of?

Jeremiah 22 : 13-19

Shame on the man who builds his house by unjust means  
and completes its roof-chambers by fraud,  
making his countrymen work without payment,  
giving them no wage for their labour!

Shame on the man who says, 'I will build a spacious house  
with airy roof-chambers,  
set windows in it, panel it with cedar  
and paint it with vermilion'!

\*If your cedar is more splendid,  
does that prove you a king?

Think of your father : he ate and drank,  
dealt justly and fairly; all went well with him.

He dispensed justice to the lowly and poor;  
did not this show he knew me? says the Lord.\*

But you have no eyes, no thought for anything but gain,  
set only on the innocent blood you can shed,  
on cruel acts of tyranny.

Therefore these are the words of the Lord concerning Jehoiakim  
son of Josiah, king of Judah:

For him no mourner shall say, 'Alas, brother, dear brother!'  
no one shall say, 'Alas, lord and master!'

He shall be buried like a dead ass,  
dragged along and flung out  
beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

Questions for Discussion :

1. What kinds of injustice are condemned in this text of Jeremiah? Can you give similar examples from contemporary life?

2. What does it mean to "know God" according to this text? (see vv. 15-16 between \*s) How should this understanding of the meaning of "knowing God" change and correct the contemporary Christian understanding of knowing God?

3. Why does God not always punish unjust rulers and unjust employers and owners as promptly as he did King Jehoiakim?

This is the interpretation, O King - it is a decree of the Most High which touches my lord the 'king. You will be banished from the society of men; you will have to live with wild beasts; you will feed on grass like oxen and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass over you until you have learnt what the Most High is sovereign over the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. The command was given to leave the stump of the tree with its roots. Now this you may know that from the time you acknowledge the sovereignty of heaven, your rule will endure. Be advised, me, O King: redeem your sins by charity and your iniquities by generosity to the wretched. So may you long enjoy peace of mind'.

All this befell King Nebuchadnezzar.

Questions for Discussion :

1. Does God deal in the same way with non-Jewish rulers as he did with the kings of Israel?
2. Is God at work in history today pulling down unjust rulers and unjust societies? Why or why not? To whom has he entrusted this task? How can it be accomplished?
3. Has Indian society reached the sufficient level of injustice to deserve the kind of destruction announced by the prophets against Israel and Judah?
4. If present day unjust societies and unjust individuals can go on in the injustice and increase in material abundance because of this injustice, does this not bring the justice of God into question? How would you explain this contradiction to a non-Christian or to an unbeliever?

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## Section 13. The Mission given to Every Christian

Psalm 8 : 1-9

O Lord our sovereign,  
how glorious is thy name in all the earth!  
Thy majesty is praised high as the heavens.  
Out of the mouths of babes, of infants at the breast,  
thou hast rebuked the mighty,  
silencing enmity and vengeance to teach thy foes a lesson.  
When I look up at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,  
the moon and the stars set in their place by thee,  
what is man that thou shouldst care for him,  
mortal man that thou shouldst care for him?  
Yet thou hast made him little less than a god,  
crowning him with glory and honour.  
Thou makest him master over all thy creatures;  
thou hast put everything under his feet:  
all sheep and oxen, all the wild beasts,  
the birds in the air and the fish in the sea,  
and all that moves along the paths of ocean.  
O Lord our sovereign,  
how glorious is thy name in all the earth!

Questions for Discussion :

1.What is the mission and responsibility given to every human being for all created things here on earth?

See also Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said 'Let us make man in our image and likeness to rule the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, and wild animals on earth, and all reptiles that crawl upon the earth.' So God created a man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, and every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God also said, 'I give you all plants that bear seed everywhere for food. All green plants I give for food to the animal, to all the birds of heaven and to all the reptiles on earth, every living creature.' So it was; and God saw all that he had made, and it was very



good. Evening came, and morning came, a sixth day.

To the Great Chief in Washington

"How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the Land? The idea is strange to us. Yet we do not own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water. How can you buy them from us? We will decide in our time.

Every part of the earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist of the divine woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory of my people.

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs.

The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his fathers' graves behind and he does not care. He kidnaps the earth from his children. He does not care. His fathers' graves and his children's birthright are forgotten.

His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the redman. But perhaps it is because the redman is a savage and does not understand...

One thing we know that the white man may one day discover. Our God is the same God. You may think now that you own him as you wish to own our land. But you cannot. He is the God of all people. And his compassion is equal for the redman and the white.

The earth is precious to him, and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator.

The whites too shall pass, perhaps sooner than other tribes. Continue to contaminate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste.

When the buffalo are all slaughtered, the wild horses all tamed ... where is the thicket? Gone. Where is the eagle? Gone. And what is it to say goodbye to the swift pony and the hunt, and end of living and beginning of survival.

We might understand if we knew what it was that the white man dreams, what hopes he describes to his children on long winter nights, what visions he burns into their minds, so that they will wish for tomorrow.

But we are savages. The white man's dreams are hidden from us...

If we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land, as it is, when you take it.

And with all your strength, with all your might, and with all your heart, preserve it for your children, and love it as God loves us all.

One thing we know, our God is the same God.

Even the white man cannot be exempt from the common destiny.

From a letter from Chief Seattle of the Duvamish tribe to the President of the United States, 1855.

2. How has this mission been distorted and the responsibility abrogated in the industrial nations? in India? Does this mission not cover ecological and environmental preservation?
3. Have we realised that we have this mission and responsibility? How can we fulfill it ourselves?
4. What is the relationship of persons to God and to the rest of creation? Does this relationship have an impact in any way on our mission on earth as human beings?

Matthew 10 : 37-39

'No man is worthy of me who cares more for father or mother than for me; no man is worthy of me who cares more for son or daughter; no man is worthy of me who does not take up his cross and walk in my footsteps, By gaining his life a man will lose it; by losing his life for my sake, he will gain it.

Questions for Discussion :

1. Why did Jesus put down the cost and conditions of discipleship so strongly - and even harshly, we might say?
2. What is the biblical teaching on our responsibility towards the poor and to justice? What cross will there be today for us if we dare to follow in Jesus' footsteps and try to implement this biblical teaching?

3. Are we who are middle class people not harbouring dreams of luxurious living?
4. Is not our heart set on fast profits, luxurious articles, drinks, etc.? Is money not the god who governs our life, our celebrations and life style?
5. Can we morally spend so lavishly on birthday parties, First Communions, weddings, funerals, etc. when our next-door neighbour's children have to go to bed hungry?
6. Do you think we will achieve happiness in our modern homes and flats if we ignore the basic needs of the millions of poor, starving people in our country?
7. Do we make a clear distinction between our NEED and our GREED?

### 1 Corinthians 13 : 1-3

And now I will show you the best way of all.

I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I am without love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy, and know every hidden truth; I may have faith strong enough to move mountains; but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may dole out all I possess, or even give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I am none the better.

### Questions for Discussion :

1. It often happens that persons who become passionately committed to justice and to simple living easily become harsh and self-righteousness. What does this passage tell us about how we should relate to others who have not yet "seen the light"?
2. How can we manifest our love when working with and for the poor and oppressed?
3. In his book, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Paulo Freire insists that the whole process of liberation must be rooted in love, which includes love for the oppressor? How do you think, this is possible? Has it got anything to do with our understanding of what really is love?

dalits, the tribals, the fisherfolk? Have we joined in protest or did we say, "This is none of our business!"?

3. What is the reason for our asserting that this is not our business? Do we need to change our attitude? Why? In what concrete way can we change to be effectively responsible to our weaker brothers and sisters?

4. Have we questioned certain moves\* by the municipality of our city, with regard to demolishing of slums, eviction of slum dwellers?

5. Have we looked into the rights of the homeless millions who have been evicted from their slums?

6. Have we questioned laws, Government orders or Acts that go against the rights of slum dwellers or of workers?

7. Have we or has any one from our group during the past year really taken the side of the oppressed by voicing our protest against the injustice meted out to them? On what occasion?

8. Have we voiced our protest against the lavish spending of money by politicians and ministers on their offices, homes, foreign tours, etc.? or have we said, "Let's not mix politics with faith"?

9. Are the analysis and evaluation of contemporary justice issues made by our church authorities accurate or biased? If biased, why are they so?

## 5. Justice for the Underprivileged

Amos 2:6-7

These are the words of the Lord:

For crime after crime of Israel

I will grant them no reprieve,

because they sell the innocent for silver

and the destitute for a pair of shoes.

They grind the heads of the poor into the earth

and thrust the humble out of their way.

## Questions for Discussion :

1. In what way can we help in setting people free from the clutches of money lenders, bonded labour, untouchability, black-marketing and hoarding?

2. What can we do for the many people in our slums and villages who are oppressed by the petty officials, bureaucrats and police?

3. Have we ever challenged the super-rich who luxuriate at the cost of the poor?



4. Do we fall for the ads and the media that boost profiteers who produce goods not for the needy but for their own profit-making?
5. Have we ever questioned the role of the big industrial houses and tycoons who parade as benefactors of society?
6. Do we take for granted the proliferation of departmental stores, 5 Star hotels and luxury goods as part of our progress? In other words, are we conscious of the sin of consumerism?

#### 6. Justice to Customers

Amos 8 : 4-6.

Listen to this, you who grind the destitute and plunder the humble, you who say, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell corn? When will the sabbath be past so that we may open our wheat again, giving short measure in the bushel and taking overweight in the silver, tilting the scales fraudulently, and selling the dust of the wheat; that we may buy the poor for silver and the destitute for a pair of shoes?'

#### 7. Justice to Children

Matthew 18 : 5-6.

But if a man is a cause of stumbling to one of these little ones who have faith in me, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

#### 8. Justice to those who have nothing

a. Luke 3 : 11-14.

The people asked him, 'Then what are we to do?' He replied, 'The man with two shirts must share with him who has none, and anyone who has food must do the same.' Among these who came to be baptized were tax-gatherers, and they said to him, 'Master, what are we to do?' He told them, 'Exact no more than the assessment.' Soldiers on service also asked him, 'And what for us?' To them he said, 'No bullying; no blackmail; make do with your pay!'

b. Proverbs 29 : 4, 14.

By just government a king gives his country stability, but by

forced contributions he reduces it to ruin.

A king who steadfastly deals out justice to the weak will be secure for ever on his throne.

c. Proverbs 31 : 8-9.

Open your mouth and speak up for the dumb, against the suit of any that oppose them; open your mouth and pronounce just sentence and give judgement for the wretched and the poor.

d. Psalms 146 : 7-9.

The Lord feeds the hungry and sets the prisoner free. The Lord restores sight to the blind and straightens backs which are bent; the Lord loves the righteous and watches over the stranger; The Lord gives heart to the orphan and widow but turns the course of the wicked to their ruin.

e. Isaiah 1: 17.

Cease to do evil and learn to do right, pursue justice and champion the oppressed; give the orphan his rights, plead the widow's cause.

Questions for Discussion :

1. What do we do when we read about atrocities against Dalits, or about the oppression of tribals, their eviction from their forests and the molestation of their women, and the ill-treatment meted out to bonded labourers by their "owner"-employers?

2. Do we take action against the harassment of women in our office or our factory?

3. What can we as a group, do for the children who are forced to work in hard labour, deprived of their childhood, of education, and of the joys that are the right of children?

4. Do we hear the cry of God in the anguish of the poor? Do we voice their just demands?

5. Have we realised that alone we can do nothing. Have we joined hands with action groups to bring out justice for the marginalised?

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FOUR

### Related Biblical References

#### #1. Jeremiah 22 : 1-5

These were the words of the Lord : Go down to the house of the king of Judah and say this: Listen to the words of the Lord, O king of Judah you who sit on David's throne, you and your courtiers and your people who come in at these gates. These are the words of the Lord: Deal justly and fairly, rescue the victim from his oppressor, do not ill-treat or do violence to the alien, the orphan or the widow, do not shed innocent blood in this place. If you obey, and only if you obey, kings who sit on David's throne shall yet come riding through these gates in chariots and on horses with their retinue of courtiers and people. But if you do not listen to my words, then by myself I swear, says the Lord, this house shall become a desolate ruin.

#### #2. Micah 2 : 1-10

Shame on those who lie in bed planning evil and wicked deeds  
and rise at daybreak to do them,  
knowing that they have the power!  
They covet land and take it by force;  
if they want a house they seize it;  
they rob a man of his home  
and steal every man's inheritance.

Therefore these are the words of the Lord:

Listen, for this whole brood I am planning disaster,  
whose yoke you cannot shake from your necks  
and walk upright; it shall be your hour of disaster.

On that day

they shall take up a poem about you  
and raise a lament thrice told,  
saying, 'we are utterly despoiled:  
the land of the Lord's people changes hands.

How shall a man have power  
to restore our fields, now parcelled out?'  
Therefore there shall be no one to assign to you

any portion by lot in the Lord's assembly.  
How they rant! They may say, 'Do not rant';  
but this ranting is all their own,  
these insults are their own invention.  
Can one ask, O house of Jacob,  
'Is the Lord's patience truly at an end?  
Are these his deeds?  
Does not good come of the Lord's words?  
He is the upright man's best friend.'  
But you are no people for me,  
rising up as my enemy to my face,  
to strip the cloak from him that was safe  
and take away the confidence of returning warriors,  
to drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes  
and rob the children of my glory for ever.  
Up and be gone; this is no resting place for you,  
you that defile yourselves would commit any mischief,  
mischief however cruel.

### #3. Zephaniah 3 : 1 - 6

Shame on the tyrant city, filthy and foul!  
No warning voice did she heed, she took no rebuke to heart,  
she did not trust in the Lord or come near to her God.  
Her officers were lions roaring in her midst,  
her rulers, wolves of the plain  
that did not wait till morning,  
her prophets were reckless, no true prophets.  
Her priests profaned the sanctuary  
and did violence to the law.  
But the Lord in her midst is just;  
he does no wrong;  
morning by morning he gives judgment,  
without fail at daybreak.  
I have wiped out the proud;  
Their battlements are laid in ruin.



#### #4. Zechariah 7 : 8-14

The word of the Lord came to Zechariah: These are the words of the Lord of Hosts: Administer true justice, show loyalty and compassion to one another, do not oppress the orphan and the widow, the alien and the poor, do not contrive any evil one against another. But they refused to listen, they turned their backs on me in defiance, they stopped their ears and would not hear. Their hearts were adamant; they refused to accept instruction and all that the Lord of Hosts had taught them by his spirit through the prophets of old, and they suffered under the anger of the Lord of Hosts. As they did not listen when I called, so I did not listen when they called, says the Lord of Hosts, and I drove them out among all the nations to whom they were strangers, leaving their land a waste behind them, so that no one came and went. Thus they made their pleasant land a waste.

#### #5. 1 Kings 21 : 1-19

Naboth of Jezreel had a vineyard near the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. One day Ahab made a proposal to Naboth: 'Your vineyard is close to my palace; let me have it for a garden; I will give you a better vineyard in exchange for it or, if you prefer, its value in silver.' But Naboth answered, 'The Lord forbid that I should let you have land which has always been in my family'. So Ahab went home sullen and angry because Naboth would not let him have his ancestral land. He lay down on his bed, covered his face and refused to eat. His wife Jezebel came in to him and said, 'What makes you so sullen and why do you refuse to eat?' He told her, 'I proposed to Naboth of Jezreel that he should let me have his vineyard at its value, or if he liked, in exchange for another, but he would not let me have the vineyard'. 'Are you or are you not king of Israel?' said Jezebel. 'Come, eat and take heart. I will make you a gift of the vineyard of Naboth of Jezreel. So she wrote a letter in Ahab's name, sealed it with his seal and sent it to the elders and notables of Naboth's city who sat in council with him. She wrote: 'Proclaim a fast and give Naboth the seat of honour among the people. And see that two scoundrels are seated opposite him to charge him with cursing God and the king, then take him out and stone him to death'. So the elders and notables of Naboth's city, who sat with him in council, carried out the instructions Jezebel had sent them in her letter: they proclaimed a fast and gave Naboth the seat of honour, and these two scoundrels came, and

sat opposite him and charged him publicly with cursing God and the king. They took him outside the city and stoned him, and sent word to Jezebel that Naboth had been stoned to death.

As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, 'Get up and take possession of the vineyard which Naboth refused to sell you, for he is no longer alive, Naboth of Jezreel is dead'. When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went to the vineyard to take possession. Then the words of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: 'Go down at once to Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; you will find him in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession. Say to him, "This is the word of the Lord, Have you killed your man, and taken his land as well?" Say to him, "This is the word of the Lord: Where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, there dogs shall lick your blood."'

#### #6. Isaiah 3: 1 - 25

Be warned: the Lord, the Lord of Hosts,  
is stripping Jerusalem and Judah

of every prop and stay,  
warrior and soldier,

judge and prophet, diviner and elder,  
captains of companies and men of rank,  
counsellor, magician, and cunning enchanter.

Then I will appoint mere boys to be their captains,  
who shall govern as the fancy takes them;

the people shall deal harshly

each man with his fellow and with his neighbour;

children shall break out against their elders,

and nobodies against men of substance.

If a man takes hold of his brother in his father's house,  
saying: 'You have a cloak, you shall be our chief;

our stricken family shall be under you'.

he will cry out that day and say,

'I will not be your master;

there is neither bread nor cloak in my house,

and you shall not make me head of the clan'.

Jerusalem is stricken and Judah fallen

because they have spoken and acted against the Lord.

rebelling against the glance of his glorious eye.  
The look on their faces testifies against them;  
like Sodom they proclaim their sins  
and do not conceal them.

Woe upon them! they have earned their own disaster.  
Happy the righteous man! all goes well with him,  
for such men enjoy the fruit of their actions.  
Woe betide the wicked! with him goes all ill,  
for he reaps the reward that he has earned.

Money-lenders strip my people bare,  
and usurers lord it over them

O my people! your guides lead you astray  
and confuse the path that you should take.  
The Lord comes forward to argue his case  
and stands to judge his people.  
The Lord opens the indictment  
against the elders of his people and their officers:  
You have ravaged the vineyard,  
and the spoils of the people are in your houses.  
Is it nothing to you that you crush my people  
and grind the faces of the poor?  
This is the very word of the Lord, the Lord of Hosts.

Then the Lord said:  
Because the women of Zion hold themselves high  
and walk with necks outstretched and wanton glances,  
moving with mincing gait  
and jingling feet,  
the Lord will give the women of Zion bald heads,  
the Lord will strip the hair from their foreheads.

In that day the Lord will take away all finery: anklets, discs,  
crescents, pendants, bangles, coronets, head-bands, armlets, necklaces,  
loquets, charms, signets, nose-rings, fine dresses, mantles, cloaks,  
flounced skirts, scarves of gauze, kerchiefs of linen, turbans, and flowing  
veils.

So instead of perfume you shall have the stench of decay,  
and a rope in place of a girdle.  
baldness instead of hair elegantly coiled,



a loin-cloth of sackings instead of a mantle.  
and branding instead of beauty.  
Your men shall fall by the sword,  
and your warriors in battle.

#7. Jeremiah 5 : 26-29

For among my people there are wicked men,  
who lay snares like a fowler's net  
and set deadly traps to catch men.  
Their houses are full of fraud,  
as a cage is full of birds.  
They grow rich and grand,  
bloated and rancorous;  
their thoughts are all of evil,  
and they refuse to do justice,  
the claims of the orphan they do not put right  
nor do they grant justice to the poor,  
Shall I not punish them for this?  
says the Lord;  
Shall I not take vengeance on such a people?

#8. Jeremiah 7 : 1-15

This word came from the Lord to Jeremiah. Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there make your proclamation: Listen to the words of the Lord, all you men of Judah who come in through these gates to worship him. These are the words of the Lord of Hosts the God of Israel: Mend your ways and your doings, that I may let you live in this place. You keep saying, 'This place is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!'. This catchword of yours is a lie; put no trust in it. Mend your ways and your doings, deal fairly with one another, do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, shed no innocent blood in this place, do not run after other gods who you ruin. Then will I let you live in this place, in the land which I gave long ago to your forefathers for all time. You gain nothing by putting your trust in this lie. You steal, you murder, you commit adultery and perjury, you burn sacrifices to Baal, you run after other gods who you have not known; then you come and stand before me in this house, which bears my name, and say, 'We are safe'; safe, you think, to indulge in all these abominations. Do you think that this house, this house which bears my name, is



a robbers' cave? I myself have seen all this, says the Lord. Go to my shrine at Shiloh, which once I made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. And now you have done all these things, says the Lord: though I took pains to speak to you, you did not listen though I called, you gave no answer.

Therefore what I did to Shiloh I will do to this house which bears my name, the house in which you put your trust, the place I gave to you and your forefathers; I will fling you away out of my sight, as I flung away all your kinsfolk, the whole brood of Ephraim.

#9. Jeremiah 12 : 1-7

O Lord, I will dispute with thee, for thou art just;  
yes, I will plead my case before thee.

Why do the wicked prosper  
and traitors live at ease?

Thou hast planted them and their roots strike deep  
they grow up and bear fruit.

Thou art ever on their lips,  
yet far from their hearts.

But thou knowest me, O Lord, thou seest me;  
thou dost test my devotion to thyself.

Drag them away like sheep to the shambles;  
set them apart for the day of slaughter.

How long must the country lie parched  
and its green grass wither?

No birds and beasts are left, because its people are so wicked,  
because, they say 'God will not see what we are doing'.

If you have raced with men and the runners have worn you down,  
how then can you hope to vie with horses?

If you fall headlong in easy country,  
how will you fare in Jordan's dense thickets?

All men, your brothers and kinsmen, are traitors to you,  
they are in full cry after you;

trust them not, for all the fine words they give you.

I have forsaken the house of Israel.

I have cast off my own  
people I have given my beloved into the power of her foes.

#10. Jeremiah 22 : 13-19

Shame on the man who builds his house by unjust means  
and completes its roof-chambers by fraud,  
making his countrymen work without payment,  
giving them no wage for their labour!  
Shame on the man who says, 'I will build a spacious house  
with airy roof-chambers,  
set windows in it, panel it with cedar  
and paint it with vermilion'!  
If your cedar is more splendid,  
does that prove you a king?  
Think of your father: he ate and drank,  
dealt justly and fairly: all went well with him.  
He dispensed justice to the lowly and poor;  
did not this show he knew me? says the Lord.  
But you have no eyes, no thought for anything but gain,  
set only on the innocent blood you can shed,  
on cruel acts of tyranny.

Therefore these are the words of the Lord concerning Jehoiakim  
son of Josiah, king of Judah:

For him no mourner shall say, 'Alas, brother, dear brother!'  
no one say, 'Alas, lord and master!'  
He shall be buried like a dead ass.  
dragged along and flung out  
beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

#11. Micah 3 : 1-12

And I said:  
Listen, you leaders of Jacob, rulers of Israel,  
should you not know what is right?  
You hate good and love evil,  
you flay men alive and tear the very flesh from their bones;  
you devour the flesh of my people,  
strip off their skins,  
splinter their bones;  
you shred them like flesh into a pot,  
like meat into a cauldron.

Then they will call to the Lord, and he will give them no answer  
when that time comes he will hide his face from them  
so wicked are their deeds.

Listen to this, leaders of Jacob,  
rulers of Israel,  
you who make justice hateful  
and wrest it from the straight course,  
building Zion in bloodshed  
and Jerusalem in iniquity.

Her rulers sell justice,  
her priests give direction in return for a bribe,  
her prophets take money for their divination,  
and yet men rely on the Lord.

'Is not the Lord among us?' they say;  
'then no disaster can befall us?'

Therefore on your account  
Zion shall become a ploughed field,  
Jerusalem a heap of ruins,  
and the temple hill rough heath.

#### #12. Micah 6 : 9-15

Hark, the Lord, the fear of whose name brings success,  
the Lord calls to the city.

Listen, O tribe of Judah and citizens in assembly,  
can I overlook the infamous false measure,  
the accursed short bushel?

Can I connive at false scales or a bag of light weights?

Your rich men are steeped in violence,  
your townsmen are all liars,  
and their tongues frame deceit.

But now I will inflict a signal of punishment on you  
to lay you waste for your sins;

you shall eat but not be satisfied,  
your food shall lie heavy on your stomach;  
you shall come to labour but not bring forth,  
and even if you bear a child,

I will give it to the sword;  
you shall sow but not reap,

you shall press the olives but not use the oil,  
you shall tread the grapes but not drink the wine.

#13. Amos 4 : 6-9

It was I who kept teeth idle in all your cities,  
who brought famine on all your settlements;  
yet you did not come back to me.

This is the very word of the Lord.

It was I who withheld the showers from you  
while there were still three months to harvest.

I would send rain on one city  
and no rain on another;  
rain would fall on one field,  
and another would be parched for lack of it.

From this city and that, men would stagger to another  
for water to drink, but would not find enough;  
yet you did not come back to me.

This is the very word of the Lord,

I blasted you with black blight and red;  
I laid waste your gardens and vineyards;  
the locust devoured your fig-trees and your olives;  
yet you did not come back to me.

This is the very word of the Lord.

#14. Amos 6 : 4-7

You who loll on beds inlaid with ivory  
and sprawl over your couches,  
feasting on lambs from the flock  
and fatted calves,  
you who pluck the strings of the lute  
and invent musical instruments like David,  
you who drink wine by the bowlful  
and lard yourselves with the richest of oils,  
but are not grieved at the ruin of Joseph -  
now therefore,  
you shall head the column of exiles;  
that will be the end of sprawling and revelry.



#15. 1 Samuel 2 : 2-8

There is none except thee,  
none so holy as the Lord,  
no rock like our God.

Cease your proud boasting,  
let no word of arrogance pass your lips;  
for the Lord is a god of all knowledge:  
he governs all that men do.

Strong men stand in mute dismay  
but those who faltered put on new strength.  
Those who had plenty sell themselves for a crust,  
and the hungry grow strong again.  
and the barren woman has seven children,  
and the mother of many sons is left to languish.  
The lord kills and he gives life,  
he sends down to Sheol, he can bring the dead up again.  
The Lord makes a man poor, he makes him rich.  
he brings down and he raises up.  
He lifts the weak out of the dust  
and raises the poor from the dunghill;  
to give them a place among the great,  
to set them in seats of honour.  
For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's,  
he has built the world upon them.

#16. Job 5 : 1-16

Call if you will, is there any to answer you?  
To which of the holy ones will you turn?  
The fool is destroyed by his own angry passions,  
and the end of childish resentment is death.  
I have seen it for myself: a fool uprooted,  
his home in sudden ruin about him,  
his children past help,  
browbeaten in court with none to save them.

Their rich possessions are snatched from them;  
what they have harvested others hungrily devour;  
the stronger man seizes it from the panniers,  
panting, thirsting for their wealth.

Mischief does not grow out of the soil  
nor trouble spring from the earth;  
man is born to trouble,  
as surely as birds fly upwards.

For my part, I would make my petition to God  
and lay my cause before him,  
who does great and unsearchable things,  
marvels without numbers.

He gives rain to the earth and sends water on the fields;  
he raises the lowly to the heights;  
the mourners are uplifted by victory;  
he frustrates the plots of the crafty,  
and they win no success,  
he traps the cunning in their craftiness,  
and the schemer's plans are thrown into confusion.

In the daylight they run into darkness,  
and grope at midday as though it were night.

He saves the destitute from their greed,  
and the needy from the grip of the strong,  
so the poor hope again,  
and the unjust are sickened.

#### #17. Psalms 10 : 2 - 18

The wicked man in his pride hunts down the poor:  
may his crafty schemes be his own undoing!

The wicked man is obsessed with his own desires,  
and in his greed gives wickedness his blessing;

arrogant as he is, he scorns the Lord  
and leaves no place for God in all his schemes.

His ways are always devious;

Thy judgements are beyond his grasp,  
and he scoffs at all restraint.

He says to himself, 'I shall never be shaken;  
no misfortune can check my course'

His mouth is full of lies and violence;  
mischief and trouble lurk under his tongue.

He lies in ambush in the villages  
and murders innocent men by stealth.

He is watching intently for some poor wretch;

He seizes him and drags him away in his net;  
He crouches stealthily like a lion in its lair  
crouching to seize its victim;  
The good man is struck down and sinks to the ground,  
and poor wretches fall into his toils.  
He says to himself, 'God has forgotten;  
He has hidden his face and has seen nothing.'  
Arise Lord, set thy hand to the task,  
do not forget the poor, O God.  
Why, O God, has the wicked man rejected thee  
and said to himself that he does not care?  
Thou seest that mischief and trouble are his companions,  
thou takest the matter into thy own hands.  
The poor victim commits himself to thee,  
fatherless, he finds in thee his helper.  
Break the power of wickedness and wrong;  
hunt out all wickedness until thou canst find no more.  
The Lord is kind for ever and ever;  
the nations have vanished from his land.  
Thou has heard the lament of the humble, O Lord,  
and art attentive to their heart's desire,  
bringing justice to the orphan and the downtrodden  
that fear may never drive men from their homes again.

#18. Psalm 135 : 5-9

I know that the Lord is great;  
that our Lord is above all gods,  
Whatever the Lord pleases,  
that he does in heaven and on earth;  
in the sea, in the depths of the ocean.  
He brings up the mist from the ends of the earth,  
he opens rifts for the rain,  
and brings the wind out of his storehouses.  
He struck down all the first-born in Egypt.  
both man and beast,  
In Egypt he sent signs and portents  
against Pharoah and all his subjects.

#19. Proverbs 15 : 25

The Lord pulls down the proud man's home  
but fixes the widow's boundary-stones.

#20. Isaiah 1 : 21-26

How the faithful city has played the whore,  
once the home of justice where righteousness dwelt -  
but now murderers!

Your silver has turned into base metal  
and your liquor is diluted with water.

Your very rulers are rebels, confederate with thieves;  
every man of them loves a bribe  
and itches for a gift;  
they do not give the orphan his rights,  
and the widow's cause never comes before them.

This therefore is the word of the Lord,  
the Lord of Hosts the Mighty One of Israel:

Enough! I will secure a respite from my foes  
and take vengeance on my enemies.

Once again I will act against you  
to refine your way your base metal as with potash  
and purge all your impurities;

I will again make your judges what once they were  
and your counsellors like those of old.

Then at length you shall be called  
the home of righteousness, the faithful city.

#21. Isaiah 26 :5-6

He has brought low all who dwell high in a towering city  
he levels it to the ground and lays it in the dust,  
that the oppressed and the poor may tread it underfoot.

#22. Isaiah 29 :17-21

The time is but short  
before Lebanon goes back to grassland  
and the grassland is no better than scrub.

On that day deaf men shall hear  
when a book is read,



and the eyes of the blind shall see  
out of impenetrable darkness.

The lowly shall once again rejoice in the Lord,  
and the poorest of men exult in the Holy One of Israel.  
The ruthless shall be no more, the arrogant shall cease to be;  
those who are quick to see mischief,  
those who charge others with a sin  
or lay traps for him who brings the wrongdoer into court  
or by falsehood deny justice to the righteous -  
all these shall be exterminated.

### #23. Ezekiel 34 :11-30

For these are the words of the Lord God: Now I myself will ask after my sheep and go in search of them. As a shepherd goes in search of his sheep when his flock is dispersed all around him, so I will go in search of my sheep and rescue them, no matter where they were scattered in dark and cloudy days. I will bring them out from every nation, gather them in from other lands, and lead them home to their own soil. I will graze them on the mountains of Israel, by her streams and in all her green fields. I will feed them on good grazing-ground, and their pasture shall be the high mountains of Israel. There they will rest, there in good pasture, and find rich grazing on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my flock, I myself pen them in their fold, says the Lord God. I will search for the lost, recover the straggler, bandage the hurt, strengthen the sick, leave the healthy and strong to play, and give them their proper food.

As for you, my flock, these are the words of the Lord God: I will judge between one sheep and another. You rams and he-goats! Are you not satisfied with grazing on good herbage, that you must trample down the rest with your feet? Or with drinking clear water, that you must churn up the rest with your feet? My flock has to eat what you have trampled and drink what you have churned up. These, therefore, are the words of the Lord God to them: Now I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean. You hustle the weary with flank and shoulder, you butt them with your horns until you have driven them away and scattered them abroad. Therefore I will save my flock, and they shall be ravaged no more; I will judge between one sheep and another. Then I will set over

them one shepherd to take care of them, my servant David; he shall care for them and become their shepherd. I, the Lord, will become their God, and my servant David shall be a prince among them. I the Lord, have spoken. I will make a covenant with them to ensure prosperity; I will rid the land of wild beasts, and men shall live in peace of mind on the open pastures and sleep in the woods. I will settle them in the neighbourhood of my hill and send them rain in due season, blessed rain. Trees in the country-side shall bear them fruit, the land shall yield its produce, and men shall live in peace of mind on their own soil. They shall know that I am the Lord when I break the bars of their yokes and rescue them from those who have enslaved them. They shall never be ravaged by the nations again nor shall wild beasts devour them; they shall live in peace of mind, with no one to alarm them. I will give prosperity to their plantations; they shall never again be victims of famine in the land nor any longer bear the taunts of the nations. They shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they are my people Israel, says the Lord God.

#24. Job : 22 : 5-9

No: it is because you are a very wicked man,  
and your depravity passes all bounds.  
Without due cause you take a brother in pledge.  
you strip men of their clothes and leave them naked.  
When a man is weary, you give him no water to drink.  
and you refuse bread to the hungry.  
Is the earth then, the preserve of the strong  
and a domain for the favoured few?  
Widows you have sent away empty-handed,  
orphans you have struck defenseless.

#25. Job 23 :1-2; 12-13

Then Job answered:  
My thoughts today are resentful,  
for God's hand is heavy on me in my trouble.  
I do not ignore the commands that come from his lips,  
I have stored in my heart what he says.

#26. Job 24 : 1-12, 19-22

The day of reckoning is no secret to the Almighty,  
though those who know him have no hint of its date.  
Wicked men move boundary-stones  
and carry away flocks and their shepherds.  
In the field they reap what is not theirs,  
and filch the late grapes from the rich man's vineyard.  
They drive off the orphan's ass  
and lead away the widow's ox with a rope.  
They snatch the fatherless infant from the breast  
and take the poor man's child in pledge.  
They jostle the poor out of the way;  
the destitute huddle together, hiding from them.  
The poor rise early like the wild ass,  
when it scours the wilderness for food;  
but though they work till nightfall,  
their children go hungry.  
Naked and bare they pass the night;  
in the cold they have nothing to cover them.  
They are drenched from rain-storms from the hills  
and hug the rock, their only shelter.  
Naked and bare they go about their work,  
and hungry they carry the sheaves;  
they press the oil in the shade where two walls meet,  
they tread the wine press but themselves go thirsty.  
Far from the city, they groan like dying men,  
and like wounded men they cry out;  
But God pays no heed to their prayer...  
As drought and heat make away with snow,  
so the waters of Sheol make away with the sinner.  
The womb forgets him, the worm sucks him dry;  
he will not be remembered ever after.  
He may have wronged the barren childless woman  
and been no help to the widow;  
yet God in his strength carries off even the mighty;  
they may rise, but they have no firm hope of life.

#27. Job 29 : 11-17

Whoever heard of me spoke in my favour,  
and those who saw me bore witness to my merit,  
how I saved the poor man when he called for help  
and the orphan who had no protector.  
The man threatened with ruin blessed me,  
and I made the widow's heart sing for joy.  
I put on righteousness as a garment and it clothed me;  
justice, like a cloak or a turban, wrapped me round.  
I was eyes to the blind  
and feet to the lame;  
I was a father to the needy,  
and I took up the stranger's cause.  
I broke the fangs of the miscreant  
and rescued the prey from his teeth.

#28. Psalms 37 :12-15

The wicked mutter against the righteous man  
and grind their teeth at the sight of him;  
the Lord shall laugh at them,  
for he sees that their time is coming.  
The wicked have drawn their swords  
and strung their bows  
to bring low the poor and needy  
and to slaughter honest men.  
Their swords shall pierce their own hearts  
and their bows be broken.

#29. Psalms 73 :2-20

My feet had almost slipped,  
my foothold had all but given way,  
because the boasts of sinners roused my envy  
when I saw how they prosper.  
No pain, no suffering is theirs;  
they are sleek and sound in limb;  
they are not plunged in trouble as other men are,  
nor do they suffer the torments of mortal men.  
Therefore pride is their collar of jewels



and violence the robe that wraps them round.  
Their eyes gleam through folds of fat;  
while vain fancies pass through their minds.  
Their talk is all sneers and malice;  
scornfully they spread their calumnies.  
Their slanders reach up to heaven,  
while their tongues ply to and fro on earth.  
And so my people follow their lead  
and find nothing to blame in them,  
even though they say, 'What does God know?  
The Most High neither knows nor cares.'  
So wicked men talk, yet still they prosper,  
and rogues amass great wealth.  
So it was all in vain that I kept my heart pure  
and washed my hands in innocence.  
For all day long I suffer torment  
and am punished every morning.  
Yet had I let myself talk on this fashion,  
I should have betrayed the family of God.  
So I set myself to think this out  
but I found it too hard for me,  
until I went into God's sacred courts;  
there I saw clearly what their end would be.  
How often thou dost set them on slippery ground  
and drive them headlong into ruin!  
Then in a moment how dreadful their end,  
cut off root and branch by death with all its terrors,  
like a dream when a man rouses himself, O Lord,  
like images in sleep which are dismissed on waking!

#30. Psalm 123 : 3-4

Deal kindly with us, O Lord, deal kindly,  
for we have suffered insult enough;  
too long have we had to suffer  
the insults of the wealthy,  
the scorn of proud men.

#31. Proverbs 20 : 17; 21 : 6; 22 : 16

Bread got by fraud taste good,  
but afterwards it fills the mouth with grit.

He who makes a fortune by telling lies  
runs needlessly into the toils of death.  
Oppression of the poor may bring gain to a man,  
but giving to the rich leads only to penury.

#32. Isaiah 10 :10-19

Before now I have found kingdoms full of idols,  
with more images than Jerusalem and Samaria,  
and now, what I have done to Samaria and her worthless gods,  
I will do also to Jerusalem and her idols.'

When the Lord has finished all that he means to do on Mount Zion  
and in Jerusalem, he will punish the king of Assyria for this fruit of his  
pride and for his arrogance and vain glory, because he said:

By my own might I have acted  
and in my own wisdom I have laid my schemes;  
I have removed the frontiers of nations  
and plundered their treasures.  
like a bull I have trampled on their inhabitants.  
My hand has found its way to the wealth of nations,  
and, as a man takes the eggs from a deserted nest,  
so I have taken every land;  
not a wing fluttered,  
not a beak gaped, no chirp was heard.

Shall the axe itself set up against the hewer,  
or the saw claim mastery over the sawyer,  
as if a stick were to brandish him who wields it,  
or a staff of wood to wield one who is not wood?

Therefore the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, will send disease  
on his sturdy frame, from head to toe,  
and within his flesh a fever like fire shall burn.

The light of Israel shall become a fire  
and his Holy One a flame,  
which in one day shall burn up and consume  
his thorns and his briars;

the glory of the forest and meadow shall be destroyed  
as when a man falls in a fit;  
and the remnant of trees in the forest shall be so few  
that child may count them one by one.

### #33. Ezekiel 22 :23-31

These were the words of the Lord to me: Man, say to Jerusalem, you are like a land on which no rain falls; no shower has come down upon you in the days of indignation. The princes within her are like lions growling as they tear their prey. They have devoured men, and seized the treasure and all their wealth; they have widowed many women within her walls. Her priests have done violence to my law and profaned what is sacred to me. They make no distinction between sacred and common and lead men to see no difference between clean and unclean. They have disregarded my sabbaths, and I am dishonoured among them. Her officers within her are like wolves tearing their prey, shedding blood and destroying men's lives to acquire ill-gotten gain. Her prophets use whitewash instead of plaster; their vision is false and their divination lies. They say, 'This is the word of the Lord God', when the Lord has not spoken. The common people are bullies and robbers; they ill-treat the unfortunate and the poor, they are unjust and cruel to the alien. I looked for a man among them who could build a barricade, who could stand before me in the breach to defend the land from ruin; but I found no such man. I poured out my indignation upon them and utterly destroyed them in the fire of my wrath. Thus I brought on them the punishment they had deserved. This is the very word of the Lord God.

### #34. Hosea 12 : 7-9

False scales are in merchants' hands,  
and they love to cheat;  
so Ephraim says, 'Surely I have become a rich man, I have made my fortune';  
but all his gains will not pay  
for the guilt of his sins.  
Yet I have been the Lord your God since your days in Egypt;  
I will make you live in tents yet again, as in the old days.

### #35. Amos 8 : 4-8

Listen to this, you who grind the destitute and plunder the humble,  
you who say, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell corn?  
When will the sabbath be past so that we may open our wheat again,  
giving short measure in the bushel and taking overweight in the silver,  
tilting the scales fraudulently, and selling the dust of the wheat; that we  
may buy the poor for silver and the destitute for a pair of shoes?' The  
Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: I will never forget any of their  
doings.

Shall not the earth shake for this?

Shall not all who live on it grieve?

All earth shall surge and seethe like the Nile  
and subside like the river of Egypt

Micah 6 : 9-15 see #12

### #36. Habakkuk 2 : 5-13

As for the traitor in his over-confidence,  
still less will he ride out the storm, for all his bragging.  
Though he opens his mouth as wide as Sheol  
and is insatiable as Death,  
gathering in all the nations,  
making all peoples his own harvest,  
surely they will all turn upon him  
with insults and abuse, and say,  
'Woe betide you who heap up wealth that is not yours  
and enrich yourself with goods taken in pledge!  
Will not your creditors suddenly start up,  
will not all awake who would shake you till you are empty,  
and will you not fall a victim to them?  
Because you yourselves have plundered mighty nations,  
all the rest of the world will plunder you,  
because of bloodshed and violence done in the land,  
to the city and all its inhabitants.  
Woe betide you who seek unjust gain for your house,  
to build your nest on a height,  
to save yourself from the grasp of wicked men!  
Your schemes to overthrow mighty nations



will bring dishonour to your house  
and put your own life in jeopardy.  
The very stones will cry out from the wall,  
and from the timbers a beam will answer them.

Woe betide you who have built a town with bloodshed  
and founded a city on fraud,  
so that the nations toil for a pittance,  
and peoples weary themselves for a mere nothing!

#37. Ezekiel 22 : 12

In you, men have accepted bribes to shed blood, and they have exacted discount and interest on their loans. You have oppressed your fellow for gain, and you have forgotten me. This is the very word of the Lord God.

#38. Exodus 23 : 10-11

For six years you may sow your land and gather its produce; but in the seventh year you shall let it lie fallow and leave it alone. It shall provide food for the poor of your people, and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard and your olive-grove.

#39. Deuteronomy 15 : 1-15

At the end of every seventh year you shall make a remission of debts. This is how the remission shall be made: everyone who holds a pledge shall remit the pledge of anyone indebted to him. He shall not press his fellow countryman for repayment, for the Lord's year of remission has been declared. You may press foreigners; but if it is a fellow-countryman that holds anything of yours, you must remit all claim upon it. There will never be any poor among you if only you obey the Lord your God by carefully keeping these commandments which I lay upon you this day, for the Lord your God will bless you with great prosperity in the land which he is giving you to occupy as your patrimony. When the Lord your God blesses you, as he promised, you will lend to men of many nations, but you yourselves will not borrow; you will rule many nations, but they will not rule you.

When one of your fellow-countrymen in any of your settlements in the land which the Lord your God is giving you becomes poor, do not be hard-hearted or close-fisted with your countryman in his need. Be

open-handed towards him and lend him on pledge as much as he needs. See that you do not harbour iniquitous thoughts when you find that the seventh year, the year of remission, is near and look askance at your needy countryman and give him nothing. If you do, he will appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give freely to him and do not be grudge him your bounty, because it is for this very bounty that the Lord your God will bless you in everything that you do or undertake. The poor will always be with you in the land, and for that reason I command you to be open-handed with your countrymen, both poor and distressed in your land.

When a fellow-Hebrew, man or woman, sells himself to you as a slave he shall serve you for six years and in the seventh year you shall set him free. But when you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed. Give to him lavishly from your flock, from your threshing-floor and your wine-press. Be generous to him, because the Lord your God has blessed you. Do not take it amiss when you have to set him free, for his six years' service to you has been worth twice the wages of a hired man. Then the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you; that is why I am giving you this command today.

#40. 2 Chronicles 36 : 17-21

So he brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who put their young men to the sword in the sanctuary and spared neither young man nor maiden, neither the old nor the weak; God gave them all into his power. And he brought all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord and of the King and his officers - all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt down the house of God, razed the city wall of Jerusalem and burnt down all its stately mansions and all their precious possessions until everything was destroyed. Those who escaped the sword he took captive to Babylon, and they became slaves to him and his sons until the sovereignty passed to the Persians, while the land of Israel ran the full term of its sabbaths. All the time that it lay desolate it kept the sabbath rest, to complete seventy years in fulfillment of the word of the Lord by the prophet Jeremiah.

#### #41. Nehemiah 10 : 28-31

'The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the door-keepers, the singers, the temple-servitors, with their wives, their sons, and the daughters, all who are capable of understanding, all who for the sake of the law of God have kept themselves apart from the foreign population, will join with the leading brethren, when the oath is put to them in swearing to obey God's law given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and fulfill all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, his rules and his statutes:

'We will not give our daughters in marriage to the foreigners, nor will we take their daughters for our sons. If on the sabbath these people bring in merchandise, especially corn, for sale, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or on any holy day. We will forgo the crops of the seventh year and release every person still held as a pledge for debt.

#### #42. Jeremiah 34 : 8-17

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim an act of freedom for the slaves. All who had Hebrew slaves, male or female, were to set them free, they were not to keep their fellow Judaeans in servitude. All the officers and people, having made this covenant to set free their slaves, both male and female, and not to keep them in servitude any longer, fulfilled its terms and let them go. Afterwards, however, they changed their minds and forced back again into slavery the men and women whom they had freed.

Then this word came from the Lord to Jeremiah: These are the words of the Lord the God of Israel: I made a covenant with your forefathers on the day that I brought them out of Egypt out of the land of slavery. These were the terms: 'Within seven years each of you shall set free any Hebrew who has sold himself to you as a slave and has served you for six years; you shall set him free.' Your forefathers did not listen to me or obey me. You, on the contrary, recently proclaimed an act of freedom for the slaves and made a covenant in my presence, in the house that bears my name, and so have done what is right in my eyes. But you have too have profaned my name. You have all taken back the slaves you had set free and you have forced them, both male and female, to be your slaves again. Therefore these are the words of the Lord: After you have



proclaimed an act of freedom, a deliverance for your kinsmen and your neighbours you did not obey me; so I will proclaim a deliverance for you, says the Lord, a deliverance over to sword, to pestilence, and to famine, and I will make you repugnant to all the kingdoms of the earth.

#### #43. Genesis 28 : 20-22

Thereupon Jacob made this vow: 'If God will be with me, if he will protect me on my journey and give my food to eat and clothes to wear, and I come back safely to my father's house, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone which I have set up as a sacred pillar shall be a house of God. And of all that thou gives me, I will without fail allot a tenth part to thee.'

#### #44. Leviticus 27 : 30-32

Every tithe on land, whether from grain or from the fruit of a tree, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. If a man wishes to redeem any of his tithe, he shall pay its value increased by one-fifth. Every tenth creature that passes under the counting rod shall be holy to the Lord; this applies to all tithes of cattle and sheep.

#### #45. Deuteronomy 14 : 22-29

Year by year you shall set aside a tithe of all the produce of your seed, of everything that grows on the land. You shall eat it in the presence of the Lord your God in the place which he will choose as a dwelling for his Name - the tithe of your corn and new wine and oil, and the first-born of your cattle and sheep, so that for all time you may learn to fear the Lord your God. When the Lord your God has blessed you with prosperity, and the place which he will choose to receive his Name is far from you and the journey too great for you to be able to carry your tithe, then you may exchange it for silver. You shall tie up the silver and take it with you to the place which the Lord your God will choose. There you shall spend it as you will on cattle or sheep, wine or strong drink, or whatever you desire; you shall consume it there with rejoicing, both you and your family, in the presence of the Lord your God. You must not neglect the Levites who live in your settlements; for they have no holding or patrimony among you.

At the end of every third year, you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce for that year and leave it in your settlements so that the



Levites, who have no holding or patrimony among you, and the alien orphans and widows in your settlements may come and eat their fill. you do this the Lord your God will bless you in everything to which you set your hand.

#46. Deuteronomy 26 : 12-13

When you have finished taking a tithe of your produce in the third year, the tithe-year, you shall give it to the Levites and to the aliens, the orphans and the widows. They shall eat it in your settlements and be well fed. Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: 'I have rid my house of the tithe that was holy to thee and given it to the Levites, to the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, according to all the commandments which thou didst lay upon me. I have not broken or forgotten any of the commandments.

#47. Luke 11 : 42

The Lord said, 'Well, who is the trusty and sensible man whom his master will appoint as his steward, to manage his servants and issue the rations at the proper time?

#48. Leviticus 19 : 9-10; 23 : 22

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap right into the edges of your field; neither shall you glean the loose ears of your crop; you shall not completely strip your vineyard nor glean the fallen grapes. You shall leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.

When you reap the harvest in your land, you shall not reap right into the edges of your field, neither shall you glean the fallen ears. You shall leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.

#49. Ruth 2 : 1-9

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a well-to-do man of the family of Elimelech; his name was Boaz. Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'May I go out to the cornfields and glean behind anyone who will grant me that favour?' 'Yes go, my daughter,' she replied. So Ruth went gleaning in the fields behind the reapers. As it happened, she was in that strip of the fields which belonged to Boaz of Elimelech's family, and there was Boaz coming out from Bethlehem. He greeted the reapers,

saying, 'The Lord be with you'; and they replied, 'The Lord bless you.' Then he asked his servant in charge of the reapers, 'Whose girl is this?' 'She is a Moabite girl', the servant answered, 'who has just come back with Naomi from the Moabite country. She asked if she might glean and gather among the swathes behind the reapers. She came and has been on her feet with hardly a moment's rest from daybreak till now.' Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Listen to me, my daughter: do not go and glean in any other field, and do not look any further, but keep close to my girls. Watch where the men reap, and follow the gleaners; I have given them orders not to molest you. If you are thirsty, go and drink from the jars the men have filled.'

#### #50. Exodus 22 : 21-27

You shall not ill-treat any widow or fatherless child. If you do, be sure that I will listen if they appeal to me; my anger will be roused and I will kill you with the sword; your own wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

If you advance money to any poor man amongst my people, you shall not act like a money-lender: you must not exact interest in advance from him.

If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall return it to him by sunset, because it is his only covering. It is the cloak in which he wraps his body; in what else can he sleep? If he appeals to me, I will listen, for I am full of compassion.

#### #51. Deuteronomy 23 : 19-20

You shall not charge interest on anything you lend to a fellow countryman, money or food or anything else on which interest can be charged.

You may charge interest on a loan to a foreigner but not on a loan to a fellow-countryman, for then the Lord your God will bless you in all you undertake in the land which you are entering to occupy.

#### #52. Nehemiah 5 : 1-12

There came a time when the common people, both men and women raised a great outcry against their fellow-Jews. Some complained

that they were giving their sons and daughters as pledges for good to keep themselves alive; others that they were mortgaging their fields, vineyards, and houses to buy corn in the famine; others again that they were borrowing money on their fields and vineyards to pay the king's tax. 'But', they said 'our bodily needs are the same as other people's; our children are as good as theirs; yet here we are, forcing our sons and daughters to become slaves. Some of our daughters are already enslaved and there is nothing we can do, because our fields and vineyards now belong to others.'

I was very angry when I heard their outcry and the story they told. I mastered my feelings and reasoned with the nobles and the magistrates. I said to them 'You are holding your fellow-Jews as pledges for debts. I rebuked them severely and said, 'As far as we have been able, we have bought back our fellow-Jews who had been sold to other nations; but you are now selling your own fellow-countrymen, and they will have to be bought back by us!' They were silent and had not a word to say. I went on, 'What you are doing is wrong. You ought to live so much in the fear of God that you are above reproach in the eyes of the nations who are our enemies. Speaking for myself I and my kinsman and the men under me are advancing them money and corn. Let us give up this taking of persons as pledges for debt. Give back today to your debtors their fields and vineyards, their olive-groves and houses, as well as the income in money, and in corn, new wine, and oil.' 'We will give them back,' they promised; 'and exact nothing more. We will do what you say.' So, summoning the priests, I put the offenders on oath to do as they had promised.

### #53. Psalms 15 : 1-5

O Lord, who may lodge in thy tabernacle?  
Who may dwell on thy holy mountain?  
The man of blameless life, who does what is right  
and speaks the truth from his heart;  
    who has no malice on his tongue,  
who never wrongs a friend  
and tells no tales against his neighbour;  
the man who shows his scorn for the worthless  
and honours all who fear the Lord;  
who swears to his own hurt and does not retract;

who does not put his money out to usury  
and takes no bribe against an innocent man.  
He who does these things shall never be brought low.

#54. Numbers 26 : 52-56

The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'The land shall be apportioned among these tribes according to the number of names recorded. To the larger group you shall give a larger property and to the smaller a smaller; a property shall be given to each in proportion to its size as shown in the detailed lists. The land, however, shall be apportioned by lot; the lots shall be cast for the properties by families in the father's line. Properties shall be apportioned by lot between the larger families and the smaller.'

Exodus 23 : 10-11 see #38

Deuteronomy 15 : 1-15 see #39

2 Chronicles 36 : 17-21 see #40

Nehemiah 10 : 28-31 see #41

Jeremiah 34 : 8-17 see #42

Genesis 28 : 20-22 see #43

Leviticus 27 : 30-32 see #44

Deuteronomy 14 : 22-29 see #45

Deuteronomy 26 : 12-13 see #46

Leviticus 19 : 9-10; 23:22 see #48

Ruth 2 : 1-9 see # 49

Exodus 22:21-27 see #50

Deuteronomy 23 : 19-20 see #51

Nehemiah 5 : 1-12 see # 52

Psalms 15 : 1-5 see # 53

#55. Luke 11 : 1-2

He looked up and saw the rich people dropping their gifts into the chests of the temple treasury; and he noticed a poor widow putting in two tiny coins.



#56. Deuteronomy 24 : 19-22

You shall not charge interest on anything you lend to a fellow countryman, money or food or anything else on which interest can be charged. You may charge interest on a loan to a foreigner but not on a loan to a fellow-countryman, for then the Lord your God will bless you in all you undertake in the land which you are entering to occupy.

#57. Matthew 5 : 13-16

‘You are salt to the world. And if salt becomes tasteless, how is its saltiness to be restored? It is now good for nothing but to be thrown away and trodden underfoot.

‘You are light for all the world. A town that stands on a hill cannot be hidden. When a lamp is lit, it is not put under the meal-tub, but on the lamp-stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. And you like the lamp, must shed light among your fellows, so that, when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

#58. Matthew 6 : 1-4

‘Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do no reward awaits you in your Father’s house in heaven.

‘Thus, when you do some act of charity, do not announce it with a flourish of trumpets, as the hypocrites do in synagogues and in the streets to win admiration from men. I tell you this: they have their reward already. No; when you do some act of charity, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing; your good deed must be secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

#59. Mark 10 : 28-31, 35-45

At this Peter spoke. ‘We here’, he said, ‘have left everything to become your followers.’ Jesus said, ‘I tell you this; there is no one who has given up home, brothers or sisters, mother, father or children, or land, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive in this age a hundred times as much - houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and land - and persecutions besides; and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last and the last first.’

James and John of Zebedee, approached him and said, 'Master, we should like you to do us a favour.' 'What is it you want me to do?' he asked. They answered, 'Grant us the right to sit in state with you, one at your right and the other at your left.' Jesus said to them, 'You do not understand what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?' 'We can', they answered. Jesus said, 'The cup that I drink you shall drink, and the baptism I am baptized with shall be your baptism; but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant; it is for those to whom it has already been assigned.'

When the other ten heard this, they were indignant with James and John. Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that in the world the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority. That is not the way with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be willing to be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many.'

#60. Mark 15 : 40-41

A number of women were also present, watching from a distance; among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome who had all followed him and waited on him when he was in Galilee, and there were several others who had come up to Jerusalem with him.

#61. Luke 8 : 1-3

After this he went journeying from town to town and village to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. With him were the Twelve and a number of women who had been set free from evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, known as Mary of Magdala, from whom seven devils had come out, Joanna the wife of Chuza, a steward of Herod's, Susanna, and many others. These women provided for them out of their own resources.

#62. Luke 22 : 14-20

When the time came he took his place at table, and the apostles with him; and he said to them, 'How I have longed to eat this Passover with

you before my death! For I tell you, never again shall I eat it until the time when it finds its fulfillment in the kingdom of God.'

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you, from this moment I shall drink from the fruit of the wine no more until the time when the kingdom of God comes.' And he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it; and he gave it to them, with the words: 'This is my body.'

#### #63a. John 12 : 6

At this Judas Iscariot, a disciple of his - the one who was to betray him - said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for thirty pounds and given to the poor?' He said this, not out of any care for the poor, but because he was a thief; he used to pilfer the money put into the common purse which was in his charge.

#### #63b. John 13 : 1-17, 29, 34-35

The devil had already put it into the mind of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. During supper, Jesus, well aware that the Father had entrusted everything to him, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from table, laid aside his garments, and taking a towel, tied it round him. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel.

When it was Simon Peter's turn, Peter said to him, 'You, Lord, washing my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You do not understand now what I am doing, but one day you will.' Peter said, 'I will never let you wash my feet.' 'If I do not wash you,' Jesus replied, 'you are not in fellowship with me.' 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter, 'not my feet only; wash my hands and head as well!'

Jesus said, 'A man who has bathed needs no further washing; he is altogether clean; and you are clean, though not everyone of you.' He added the words 'not every one of you' because he knew who was going to betray him.

After washing their feet and taking his garments again, he sat down. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked. 'You call me "Master" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am. Then if I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done



for you. In very truth I tell you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor a messenger than the one who sent him. If you know this, happy are you if you act upon it.

...Some supposed that, as Judas was in charge of the common purpose, Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to make some gift to the poor. As soon as Judas had received the bread he went out. It was night.

...I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, so you are to love one another. If there is this love among you, then all will know that you are my disciples.'

#64. Acts 2 : 41-47

Then those who accepted his word were baptized, and some three thousand were added to their number that day.

They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and to share the common life, to break bread, and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere, and many marvels and signs were brought about through the apostles. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common; they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required. With one mind they kept up their daily attendance at the temple, and, breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy, as they praised God and enjoyed the favour of the whole people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those whom he was saving.

#65. Acts 4 : 32-37

The whole body of believers was united in heart and soul. Not a man of them claimed any of his possessions as his own, but everything was held in common, while the apostles bore witness with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They were all held in high esteem; for they had never a needy person among them, because all who had property in land or houses sold it, brought the proceeds of the sale, and laid the money at the feet of the apostles; it was then distributed to any who stood in need.



#### #66. Acts 6 : 1-7

During this period, when disciples were growing in number, there was disagreement between those of them who spoke Greek and those who spoke the language of the Jews. The former party complained that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called the whole body of disciples together and said, 'It would be a grave mistake for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait a table. Therefore, friends, look out seven men of good reputation for you, number, men full of the Spirit and of wisdom, and vote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.' This proposal proved acceptable to the whole body. They elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, a former convert to Judaism. These they presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The word of God now spread more and more widely; the number of disciples in Jerusalem went on increasing rapidly, and very many of the priests adhered to the Faith.

#### #67. Acts 11 : 27-30

During this period some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, Agabus by name, was inspired to stand up and predict a severe and world-wide famine, which in fact occurred in the reign of Claudius. So the disciples agreed to make a contribution, each according to his means, for the relief of their fellow-Christians in Judaea. This they did, and sent it off to the elders, in the charge of Barnabas and Saul.

#### #68. 1 Corinthians 16 : 1-4

And now about the collection in aid of God's people: you should follow my directions to our congregation in Galatia. Every Sunday each of you is to put aside and keep by him a sum in proportion to his gains, so that there may be no collecting when I come. When I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to persons approved by you, and send them to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it should seem worthwhile for me to go as well, they shall go with me.

#### #69. Acts 21 : 10-14

When we had been there several days, a prophet named Agabus arrived from Judaea. He came to us, took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands with it, and said, 'These are the words of the Holy Spirit: Thus will the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man to whom this belt belongs, and hand him over to the Gentiles.' When we heard this, we and the local people begged and implored Paul to abandon his visit to Jerusalem. Then Paul gave his answer: 'Why all these tears? Why are you trying to weaken my resolution? For my part I am ready not merely to be bound but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' So, as he would not be persuaded, we gave up and said, 'The Lord's will be done.'

#### #70. Acts 24 : 10-17

Then the Governor motioned to Paul to speak, and he began his reply: 'Knowing as I do that for many years you have administered justice in this province, I make my defence with confidence. You can ascertain the facts for yourself. It is not more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage. They did not find me arguing with anyone, or collecting a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogue or up and down the city; and they cannot make good the charges they bring against me. But this much I will admit: I am a follower of the new way (the "sect" they speak of), and it is in that manner that I worship the God of our fathers; for I believe all that is written in the Law and the prophets and in reliance on God I hold the hope, which my accusers too accept, that there is to be a resurrection of good and wicked alike. Accordingly I, no less than they, train myself to keep at all times a clear conscience before God and man.'

'After an absence of several years I came to bring charitable gifts to my nation and to offer sacrifices.'

#### #71. Romans 15 : 25-29

But at the moment I am on my way to Jerusalem, on an errand to God's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia have resolved to raise a common fund for the benefit of the poor among God's people at Jerusalem. They have resolved to do so, and indeed they are under an obligation to them. For if the Jewish Christians shared their spiritual treasures with the Gentiles, the Gentiles have a clear duty to contribute

to their material needs. So when I have finished this business and delivered the proceeds under my own seal, I shall set out for Spain by way of your city, and I am sure that when I arrive I shall come to you with a full measure of the blessing of Christ.

#### #72. 2 Corinthians 8 : 1-15

We must tell you, friends, about the grace and generosity which God has imparted to our congregations in Macedonia. The troubles they have been through have tried them hard, yet in all this they have been so exuberantly happy that from the depths of their poverty they have shown themselves lavishly open-handed. Going to the limit of their resources, as I can testify, and even beyond that limit, they begged us most instantly, and on their own initiative, to be allowed to share in this generous service to their fellow-Christians. And their giving surpassed our expectations; for they gave their very selves, offering them in the first instance to the Lord but also, under God, to us. The upshot is that we have asked Titus, who began it all, to visit you and bring this work of generosity also to completion. You are so rich in everything - in faith, speech, knowledge and zeal of every kind, as well as in the loving regard you have for us - surely you should show yourselves equally lavish in this generous service! This is not meant as an order; by telling you how keen others are I am putting your love to the test. For you know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been: he was rich; yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

Here is my considered opinion on the matter. What I ask you to do is in your own interests. You made a good beginning last year both in the work you did and in your willingness to undertake it. Now I want you to go on and finish it: be as eager to complete the scheme as you were to adopt it and give according to your means. Provided there is an eager desire to give, God accepts what a man has; he does not ask for what he has not.

There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality. At the moment your surplus meets their needs but one day your need may be met from their surplus. The aim is equality; as Scripture has it, 'The man who got much had no more than enough, and the man who got little did not go short.'



### #73. 2 Corinthians 9 : 1-15

About the provision of aid for God's people, it is superfluous for me to write to you. I know how eager you are to help; I speak of it with pride to the Macedonians: I tell them that Achaia had everything ready last year; and most of them have been fired by your zeal. My purpose in sending these friends is to ensure that what we have said about you in this matter should not prove to be an empty boast. By that I mean, I want you to be prepared, as I told them you were; for if I bring with me men from Macedonia and they find you are not prepared, what a disgrace it will be to us, let alone to you, after all the confidence we have shown! I have accordingly thought it necessary to ask these friends to go on ahead to Corinth, to see that your promised bounty is in order before I come; it will then be awaiting me as a bounty indeed, and not as an extortion.

Remember: sparse sowing, sparse reaping; sow bountifully and you will reap bountifully. Each person should give as he has decided for himself; there should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsion; God loves a cheerful giver. And it is in God's power to provide you richly with every good gift; thus you will have ample means in yourselves to meet each and every situation, with enough and to spare for every good cause. Scripture says of such a man: 'He has lavished his gifts on the needy, his benevolence stands fast for ever.' Now he who provides seed for sowing and bread for food will provide the seed for you to sow: he will multiply it and swell the harvest of your benevolence, and you will always be rich enough to be generous. Through our action such generosity will issue in thanksgiving to God, for as a piece of willing service this is not only a contribution towards the needs of God's people; more than that, it overflows in a flood of thanksgiving to God. For through the proof which this affords, many will give honour to God when they see how humbly you obey him and how faithfully you confess the gospel of Christ; and will thank him for your liberal contribution to their need and to the general good. And as they join in prayer on your behalf, their hearts will go out to you because of the richness of the grace which God has imparted to you. Thanks be to God for his gift beyond words!

### #74. Galatians 2: 7-10

These men of repute, I say, did not prolong the consultation, but on the contrary acknowledged that I had been entrusted with the Gospel for



Gentiles as surely as Peter had been entrusted with the Gospel for Jews. For God whose action made Peter an apostle to the Jews, also made me an apostle to the Gentiles.

Recognizing, then, the favour thus bestowed upon me, those reputed pillars of our society, James, Cephas, and John, accepted Barnabas and myself as partners, and shook hands upon it, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles while they went to the Jews. All they asked was that we should keep their poor in mind, which was the very thing I made it my business to do.

#75. Romans 12 : 9-13

Love in all sincerity, loathing evil and clinging to the good. Let love for our brotherhood breed warmth of mutual affection. Give pride of place to one another in esteem.

With unflagging energy, in ardour of spirit, serve the Lord. Let hope keep you joyful; in trouble stand firm; persist in prayer. Contribute to the needs of God's people, and practise hospitality.

#76. 1 Corinthians 10 : 16-17

From your own judgement on what I say. When we bless 'the cup of blessing', is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf we, many as we are, are one body; for it is one loaf of which we all partake.

#77. 1 Corinthians 11 : 17-34

In giving you these injunctions I must mention a practice which I cannot commend: your meetings tend to do more harm than good. To begin with, I am told that when you meet as a congregation you fill into sharply divided groups; and I believe that there is some truth in it (for dissensions are necessary if only to show which of your members are sound). The result is that when you meet as a congregation, it is impossible for you to eat the Lord's Supper, because each of you is in such a hurry to eat his own, and while one goes hungry another has too much to drink. Have you no homes of your own to eat and drink in? Or are you so contemptuous of the church of God that you shame its poorer

members? What am I to say? Can I commend you? On this point, certainly not!

For the tradition which I handed on to you came to me from the Lord himself; that the Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread and, giving thanks to God, broke it and said: 'This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me.' In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said: 'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.' For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes.

It follows that anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of desecrating the body of the Lord. A man must test himself before eating his share of the bread and drinking from the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgement on himself if he does not discern the Body. That is why many of you are feeble and sick, and a number have died. But if we examined ourselves, we should not thus fall under judgement. When, however, we do fall under the Lord's judgement, he is disciplining us, to save us from being condemned with the rest of the world.

Therefore, my brothers, when you meet for a meal, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that in meeting together you may not fall under judgement. The other matters I will arrange when I come.

#78. 2 Corinthians 1 : 3-7

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the all-merciful Father, the God whose consolation never fails us! He comforts us in all our troubles, so that we in turn may be able to comfort others in any trouble of theirs and to share with them the consolation we ourselves receive from God. As Christ's cup of suffering overflows, and we suffer with him, so also through Jesus Christ our consolation overflows. If distress be our lot, it is the price we pay for your consolation, for your salvation; if our lot be consolation, it is to help us to bring you comfort, and strength to face with fortitude the same sufferings we now endure. And our hope for you is firmly grounded; for we know that if you have part in the suffering, you have part also in the divine consolation.

#79. 2 Corinthians 11 : 27-29.

I have toiled and drudged, I have often gone without sleep; hungry and thirsty, I have often gone fasting; and I have suffered from cold and exposure.

; Apart from these external things, there is the responsibility that weighs on me every day, my anxious concern for all our congregations. If anyone is weak, do I not share his weakness? If anyone is made to stumble, does my heart not blaze with indignation?

#80. Galatians 6 : 9-10

So let us never tire of doing good, for if we do not slacken our efforts we shall in due time reap our harvest. Therefore, as opportunity offers, let us work for the good of all, especially, members of the household of the faith.

#81. 1 Timothy 5 : 9-10

A widow should not be put on the roll under sixty years of age. She must have been faithful in marriage to one man, and must produce evidence of good deeds performed, showing whether she has had the care of children, or given hospitality, or washed the feet of God's people, or supported those in distress - in short, whether she has taken every opportunity of doing good.

#82. Hebrews 13 : 1-3

Never cease to love your fellow-Christians.

Remember to show hospitality. There are some who, by so doing, have entertained angels without knowing it.

Remember those in prison as if you were there with them; and those who are being maltreated, for you like them are still in the world.

#83. James 2 : 1-9

My brothers, believing as you do in our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns in glory, you must never show snobbery. For instance, two visitors may enter your place of worship, one a well-dressed man with gold rings, and the other a poor man in shabby clothes. Suppose you pay special attention to the well-dressed man and say to him, 'Please take this seat'. while to the poor man you say, 'You can stand; or you may sit



here on the floor by my foot stool', do you not see that you are inconsistent and judge by false standards?

Listen, my friends. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he has promised to those who love him? And yet you have insulted the poor man. Moreover, are not the rich your oppressors? Is it not they who drag you into court and pour contempt on the honoured name by which God has claimed you?

If, however, you are observing the sovereign law laid down in Scripture, 'Love your neighbour as yourself', that is excellent. But if you show snobbery, you are committing a sin and you stand convicted by that law as transgressors.

Job 22 : 5-9 see #24

Job 23 : 1-2, 12-13 see #25

Job 24 : 1-12, 19-22 see #26

Job 29 : 11-17 see #27

Psalms 37 : 12-15 see #28

Psalms 73 : 2-20 see #29

Psalms 123 : 3-4 see #30

Proverbs 20 : 17; 21 : 6; 22 : 16 see #31

Isaiah 10 : 10-19 see #32

Ezekiel 22 : 23-31 see #33

Hosea 12 : 7-9 see #34

Amos 8 : 4-8 see #35

Micah 6 : 9-15 see #12

Habakkuk 2 : 5-13 see #36

Ezekiel 22 : 12 see #37

#84. James 5 : 1-6

Next a word to you who have great possessions. Weep and wail over the miserable fate descending on you. Your riches have rotted; your fine clothes are moth-eaten; your silver and gold have rusted away, and their very rust will be evidence against you and consume your flesh like



fire. You have piled up wealth in an age that is near its close. The wages you never paid to the men who mowed your fields are loud against you, and the outcry of the reapers has reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts. You have lived on earth in wanton luxury, fattening yourselves like cattle - and the day for slaughter has come. You have condemned the innocent and murdered him; he offers no resistance.

#85. 2 Thessalonians 3 : 6, 10-12

There are our orders to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: hold aloof from every Christian brother who falls into idle habits, and does not follow the tradition you received from us.

For even during our stay with you we laid down the rule the man who will not work shall not eat. We mention this because we hear that some of your number are idling their time away, minding everybody's business but their own. To all such we give these orders and we appeal to them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly for their living.

#86. Proverbs 10 :11; 11 :26; 13 :4; 14 : 23; 20 : 13; 23 : 21;  
24 : 30-34; 29 : 7.

The words of good men are a fountain of life;  
the wicked are choked by their own violence.

He who withholds his grain is cursed by the people,  
but he who sells his corn is blessed.

A lazy man is torn by appetite unsatisfied,  
but the diligent grow fat and prosperous.

The pains of toil bring grain,  
but mere talk brings nothing but poverty.

Love sleep, and you will end in poverty;  
keep your eyes open, and you will eat your fill.

Drink and greed will end in poverty,  
and drunken stupor goes in rags.

I passed by the field of an idle man,  
by the vineyard of a man with no sense.

I looked, and it was all dried up,  
it was overgrown with thistles

and covered with weeds,  
and the stones of its wall had been torn down.  
I saw and I took good note,  
I considered and learnt the lesson:  
a little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands in rest,  
and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
want like a ruffian.

The righteous man is concerned for the cause of the helpless  
but the wicked understand no concern.

#87. 2 Thessalonians 3 : 11-13

We hear that some of your number are idling their time away,  
minding everybody's business but their own. To all such we give these  
orders, and we appeal to them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to  
work quietly for their living.

But you, my friends, must never tire of doing right.

#88. Proverbs 14 : 21.

He who despises a hungry man does wrong,  
but he who is generous to the poor is happy.

#89. Exodus 22 : 21-24

You shall not wrong an alien, or be hard upon him; you were  
yourselves aliens in Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or fatherless  
child. If you do, be sure that I will listen if they appeal to me; my anger  
will be roused and I will kill you with the sword; your own wives shall  
become widows and your children fatherless.

#90. Exodus 23 : 9-12

You shall not oppress the alien, for you know how it feels to be an  
alien; you were aliens yourselves in Egypt.

For six years you may sow your land and gather its produce; but in  
the seventh year you shall let it lie fallow and leave it alone. It shall  
provide food for the poor of your people, and what they leave the wild  
animals may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard and your  
olive-grove.

For six days you may do your work, but on the seventh day you shall abstain from work, so that your ox and your ass may rest, and your home-born slave and the alien may refresh themselves.

#91. Deuteronomy 24 : 17-18; 27 : 19.

You shall not deprive aliens and orphans of justice nor take a widow's cloak in pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; that is why I command you to do this.

'A curse upon him who withholds justice from the alien, the orphan, and the widow': the people shall all say, 'Amen'.

#92. Psalm 41 : 12

But I am upheld by thee because of my innocence;  
thou keepest me for ever in thy sight.

#93. Psalm 72 : 1-4; 12-14.

O God, endow the king with thy own justice,  
and give thy righteousness to a king's son,  
that he may judge thy people rightly  
and deal out justice to the poor and suffering.  
May hills and mountains afford thy people  
peace and prosperity in righteousness.  
He shall give judgement for the suffering  
and help those of the people that are needy;  
he shall crush the oppressor...

For he shall rescue the needy from the rich oppressors,  
the distressed who have no protector.  
May he have pity on the needy and the poor,  
deliver the poor from death;  
may he redeem them from oppression and violence  
and may their blood be precious in his eyes.

#94. Psalms 82 : 1-5.

God takes his stand in the court of heaven  
to deliver judgement among the gods themselves.

How long will you judge unjustly  
and show favour to the wicked?

You ought to give judgement for the weak and the orphan,  
and see right done to the destitute and downtrodden,  
you ought to rescue the weak and the poor,  
and save them from the clutches of wicked men.  
But you know nothing, you understand nothing,  
you walk in the dark  
while earth's foundations are giving way.

#95. Proverbs 14 : 31; 21 : 13; 22: 9; 22 : 22-23; 23 : 10-11;  
29 : 7; 31 : 8-9.

He who oppresses the poor insults his Maker;  
he who is generous to the needy honours him.

If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the helpless,  
he will cry for help himself and not be heard.

The kindly man will be blessed,  
for he shares his food with the poor.

Never rob a helpless man because he is helpless,  
nor ill-treat a poor wretch in court;  
for the Lord will take up their cause  
and rob him who robs them of their livelihood.

Do not move the ancient boundary-stone  
or encroach on the land of orphans :  
they have a powerful guardian  
who will take up their cause against you.

The righteous man is concerned for the cause of the helpless,  
but the wicked unders'and no such concern.

Open your mouth and speak up for the dumb,  
against the suit of any that oppose them;  
open your mouth and pronounce just sentence  
and give judgement for the wretched and the poor.

#96. Ecclesiastes 4 : 1.

Again, I considered all acts of oppression here under the sun; I saw the tears of the oppressed, and I saw that there was no one to comfort them.



#97. Isaiah 32 : 5-8.

The scoundrel will no longer be thought noble,  
nor the villain called a prince;  
for the scoundrel will speak like a scoundrel  
and will hatch evil in his heart;  
he is an impostor in all his actions,  
and in his words a liar even to the Lord;  
he starves the hungry of their food  
and refuses drink to the thirsty.  
The villain's ways are villainous  
and he devises infamous plans  
to ruin the poor with his lies  
and deny justice to the needy.  
But the man of noble mind forms noble designs  
and stands firm in his nobility.

#98. Isaiah 33 : 14-16.

In Zion sinners quake with terror,  
the godless are seized with trembling and ask,  
Can any of us live with a devouring fire?  
Can any live in endless burning?  
The man who lives an upright life and speaks the truth,  
who scorns to enrich himself by extortion,  
who snaps his fingers at a bribe,  
    who stops his ears to hear nothing of bloodshed  
    who closes his eyes to the sight of evil -  
that is the man who shall dwell on the heights,  
his refuge a fastness in the cliffs,  
his bread secure and his water never failing.

#99. Jeremiah 21 : 11-12.

To the royal house of Judah.  
Listen to the word of the Lord:  
O house of David, these are the words of the Lord:  
Administer justice betimes,  
rescue the victim from his oppressor,  
lest the fire of my fury blaze up and burn unquenched  
because of your evil doings.

#100. Luke 11 : 37-41.

When he had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to a meal. He came in and sat down. The Pharisee noticed with surprise that he had not begun by washing before the meal. But the Lord said to him, 'You Pharisees! You clean the outside of cup and plate; but inside you there is nothing but greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside too? But let what is in the cup be given in charity and all is clean.'

'Alas for you Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and rue and every garden-herb, but have no care for justice and the love of God.'

#101. Luke 12 : 32-34

'Have no fear, little flock; for your Father has chosen to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give in charity. Provide for yourselves purses that do not wear out, and never-failing treasure in heaven, where no thief can get near it, no moth destroy it. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

#102. Luke 14 : 12-14.

Then he said to his host, 'When you are having a party for lunch or supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers or other relations, or your rich neighbours; they will only ask you back again, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a party, ask the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind; and so find happiness. For they have no means of repaying you; but you will be repaid on the day when good men rise from the dead.'

#103. Luke 19: 1-10.

Entering Jericho he made his way through the city. There was a man there named Zacchaeus; he was superintendent of taxes and very rich. He was eager to see what Jesus looked like; but, being a little man, he could not see him for the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see him, for he was to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said, 'Zacchaeus, be quick and come down; I must come and stay with you today.' He climbed down as fast as he could and welcomed him gladly. At this there was a general murmur of disapproval. 'He has gone in', they said, 'to be the guest of a sinner.' But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Here and

now, sir, I give half my possessions to charity; and if I have cheated anyone, I am ready to repay him four times over.' Jesus said to him 'Salvation has come to this house today! - for this man too is a son of Abraham, and the Son of Man has come to seek and save what is lost.'

#104. Acts 9 : 36-41.

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek, Dorcas meaning a gazelle), who filled her days with acts of kindness and charity. At that time she fell ill and died; and they washed her body and laid it in a room upstairs. As Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples who had heard that Peter was there sent two men to him with the urgent request, 'Please come over to us without delay.' Peter thereupon went off with them. When he arrived they took him upstairs to the room where all the widows came and stood round him in tears, showing him the shirts and coats that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. Peter sent them all outside, and knelt down and prayed. Then turning towards the body, he said, 'Get up, Tabitha.' She opened her eyes and saw Peter, and sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the members of the congregation and the widows and showed her to them alive.

#105. Ephesians 4 : 28.

The thief must give up stealing, and instead work hard and honestly, with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with the needy.

#106. James 1 : 27.

The kind of religion which is without stain or fault in the sight of God our Father is this: to go to the help of orphans and widows in their distress and keep oneself untarnished by the world.

#107. Isaiah 1 : 10-17.

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom;  
attend, you people of Gomorrah, to the instruction of our God  
Your countless sacrifices, what are they to me?  
says the Lord.

I am sated with whole offerings of rams and the fat of buffaloes;  
I have no desire for the blood of bulls,  
of sheep and of he-goats.

Whenever you come to enter my presence -



who asked you for this?

No more shall you trample my courts.

The offer of your gifts is useless,  
the reek of sacrifice is abhorrent to me.

New moons and sabbaths and assemblies,  
sacred seasons and ceremonies, I cannot endure.

I cannot tolerate your new moons and your festivals;  
they have become a burden to me,

and I cannot put up with them no longer.

When you lift your hands outspread in prayer,

I will hide my eyes from you.

Though you offer countless prayers,

I will not listen.

There is blood on your hands;

wash yourselves and be clean.

Put away the evil of your deeds,  
away out of my sight.

Cease to do evil and learn to do right,

pursue justice and champion the oppressed;

give the orphan his rights, plead the widow's cause.

#108. Isaiah 48: 1-20.

Hear this, you house of Jacob,

you who are called by the name of Israel,

you who spring from the seed of Judah;

who swear by the name of the Lord

and boast in the God of Israel,

but not in honesty or sincerity,

although you call yourselves citizens of a holy city

and lean for support on the God of Israel;

his name is the Lord of Hosts.

Long ago I announced what would first happen,

I revealed it with my own mouth;

suddenly I acted and it came about.

I knew that you were stubborn,

your neck stiff as iron, your brow like bronze,

therefore I told you of these things long ago,

and declared them before they came about,

so that you could not say, 'This was my idol's doing;



my image, the god that I fashioned, he ordained them.'

You have heard what I said; consider it well,  
and you must admit the truth of it.

Now I show you new things,  
hidden things which you did not know before.

They were not created long ago, but this very hour;  
you had never heard of them before today.

You cannot say, 'I know them already.'

You neither heard of them nor knew,  
long ago your ears were closed;

for I knew that you were untrustworthy, treacherous,  
a notorious rebel from your birth.

For the sake of my own name I was patient,  
rather than destroy you I held myself in check.

See how I tested you, not as silver is tested,  
but in the furnace of affliction; there I purified you.

For my honour, for my own honour I did it;  
let them disparage my past triumphs if they will:

I will not give my glory to any other god.

Hear me, Jacob,  
and Israel whom I called:

I am He; I am the first,

I am the last also.

With my own hands I founded the earth,  
with my right hand I formed the expanse of sky;  
when I summoned them,  
they sprang at once into being.

Assemble, all of you, and listen to me;  
which of you has declared what is coming,  
that he whom I love shall wreak my will on Babylon  
and the Chaldaeans shall be scattered?

I, I myself, have spoken, I have called him,  
I have made him appear, and wherever he goes he shall prosper  
Draw near to me and hear this:

from the beginning I have never spoken in secret;  
from the moment of its first happening I was there.

Thus says the Lord your ransomers, the Holy One of Israel:  
I am the Lord your God:

I teach you for your own advantage  
and lead you in the way you must go.  
If only you had listened to my commands,  
your prosperity would have rolled like a river in flood  
and your just success like the waves of the sea;  
in number your children would have been like the sand  
and your descendants countless as its grains;  
their name would never be erased or blotted from my sight  
Come out of Babylon, hasten away from the Chaldaeans;  
proclaim it with loud songs of triumph,  
crying the news to the ends of the earth;  
tell them, 'The Lord has ransomed his servant Jacob.'

#109. Matthew 25 : 31-46.

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit in state on his throne, with all the nations gathered before him. He will separate men into two groups, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and he will place the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right hand, "You have my Father's blessing; come, enter and possess the kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made. For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger, you took me into your home, when naked, you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me." Then the righteous will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison and come to visit you?" And the king will answer, "I tell you this: Any thing you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me."

Then he will say to those on his left hand, "The curse is upon you; go from my sight to the eternal fire that is ready for the devil and his angels. For when I was hungry you gave me nothing to eat, when thirsty nothing to drink; when I was a stranger you gave me no home, when naked you did not clothe me; when I was ill and in prison you did not come to my help." And they too will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison and did nothing for you?" And he will answer, "I tell you this: anything you did not do for one of these, however humble, you did not do for me."

And they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous will live forever.' eternal life.'

#110. Luke 3 : 7-11.

Crowds of people came out to be baptized by him (John Baptist), and he said to them: 'You vipers' brood! Who warned you to escape from the coming retribution? Then prove your repentance by fruit it bears; and do not begin saying to yourselves, "we have Abraham for our father." I tell you that God can make children for Abraham of these stones here. Already the axe is laid to the roots of the trees; and every tree that fails to produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on fire.'

The people asked him, 'Then what are we to do?' He replied, 'The man with two shirts must share with him who has none, and anyone who has food must do the same.'

#111. Luke 20 : 45-47

In the hearing of all the people, Jesus said to his disciples: 'Beware of the doctors of the law who love to walk up and down in long robes and have a great liking for respectful greetings in the street, the chairs of seats in our synagogues, and places of honour at feasts. These are the men who eat up the property of widows, while they say long prayers for their appearance' sake; and they will receive the severest sentence.'

#112. James 2 : 14-17

My brothers, what use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it? Can that faith save him? Suppose a brother or a sister is in rags with not enough food for the day, and one of you says 'Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm and have plenty to eat', but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? Faith without action is dead; if it does not lead to action, it is in itself a lifeless thing.

#113. 1 John 3 : 16-18

It is by this that we know what love is: that Christ laid down his life for us. And we in turn are bound to lay down our lives for our brothers. But if a man has enough to live on and yet when he sees his brother in need shuts up his heart against him, how can it be said that the divine love dwells in him?



#### #114. 1 John 4 : 7-8

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God. everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God.

#### #115. Matthew 5 : 43-48

‘You have learned that they were told, "Love your neighbour, hate your enemy." But what I tell you is this: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest. If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? Surely the tax-gatherers do as much as that. And if you greet only your brothers, what is there extraordinary about that? Even the heathen do as much. There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father’s goodness knows no bounds.

#### #116. Deuteronomy 10 : 17-19

The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and terrible God. He is no respecter of persons and is not to be bribed; he secures justice for widows and orphans, and loves the alien who lives among you, giving him food and clothing. You too must love the alien, for you once live as aliens in Egypt.

#### #117. Exodus 23 : 1-3

You shall not spread a baseless rumour. You shall not make common cause with a wicked man by giving malicious evidence.

You shall not be led into wrong doing by the majority, nor, when you give evidence in a law suit, shall you side with the majority to pervert justice; nor shall you favour the poor man in his suit.

#### #118. Job 34 : 17-19

Can it be that a hater of justice holds the reins?  
Do you disparage a sovereign whose rule is so fair,  
Who will say to a prince, ‘You scoundrel’,  
and call his magnates blackguards to their faces;  
who does not show special favour to those in office  
and thinks no more of rich than of poor?



#119. Romans 1 : 14-16

I am under obligation to Greek and non-Greek, to learned and simple hence my eagerness to declare the Gospel to you in Rome as well as to others. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the saving power of God for everyone who has faith - the Jew first, but the Greek also.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESPONSE OF THE CHURCHES TO THE CHALLENGE OF OPPRESSION

If we were to write the history of the Churches, we would realise that throughout the Churches' existence in India, there have always been people who have participated in the struggles of the poor, sharing their hopes and aspirations, their problems and issues, their sorrows and successes. They have done so because they were poor themselves, or because they made an option for the poor, or because they believed that in working for God's justice, they had to give priority to the situation of injustice among the poor. Through this commitment to the poor, they expressed their commitment to God. They are aware that in obedience to the mission of Christ, they are to be of service to those who are the "least of Christ's brethren".

But, we can also write the Churches' history by accentuating how the ecclesiastical institutions related to the principalities and powers of this world rather than to the whole people of God. When ecclesiastical bodies accepted an alliance with the powerful, the poor were no longer considered as the 'heirs of the Kingdom'. While poverty was exalted as an ideal, and as a rule of life for many in the Church, the poor who were dependent, needy, whose life was limited and who looked for a change of their condition, were neglected. When they were given low priority in the life of the Churches, despite the idealisation of poverty, ecclesiastical institutions frequently became part of oppressive systems.

These opposing trends exist today in the Church in India. While there are many Christians who truly express their commitment to God through their dedication to the cause of the oppressed and marginalised, there do exist institutions which have neglected the poor, and by being closely related to the powerful elite in the country, are alienated from the poor.

## Section 1. Categories of Present-Day Church Social Work Organisation

During the past decades, the Indian Christian Bishops of various denominations have promulgated very many statements concerning social work and the responsibility of the Church to work for the total liberation of the human person so that he or she may once more attain the fullness of humanity that God had planned when he created man and woman to his image and likeness (Genesis 1:26).

For a long time, the Churches in India have made several and serious efforts in social work. However, have these endeavours achieved anything in the line of the total and integral liberation of the human person and the sector of society that is living in sub-human conditions? We wonder if we can answer this question positively to any extent. In fact, in spite of the many statements that are disseminated by the Bishops of all Christian denominations, very few Church organisations act in consonance with the theological and developmental orientations contained in the statements of the Bishops.

### 1. Institutional Programmes

Most of the development programmes of the Churches still tend to be rather institutional and static. Many years ago, the various denominations of the Church received very much financial help from Christian resource agencies abroad to set up schools, colleges and hospitals, and they have continued to keep up these institutions, because they hold that these still fulfill an evangelistic objective. Gradually most of these institutions have grown large and bureaucratised. The bigger they have grown, the costlier have become their infrastructure, equipment and maintenance.

Consequently, these institutions perforce have to cater more to the elite of the country and have become generally incapable of catering primarily to the ordinary people, especially the vast number of the poor and underprivileged of the land. Doubtless, many of them draw upon the resources they get from their rich students or clients in order to help some poor people. However, the whole value system that is created in these institutions by the overwhelming influence of the rich majority they cater to, is deleterious to the poorer students who have been admitted into them, and to a great extent, to the very institution itself.

So, while there are innumerable Christian schools and colleges, situated mostly in the cities, which have only twenty per cent of the Indian population, the masses of the population in the rural areas and in the slums of our cities still remain illiterate. Their health needs are also less catered to, while the greater proportion of Christian hospitals flourish in cities and towns.

However, we do not see institutions as totally negative realities. The history of development shows that there is need of a simultaneous co-existence of conservative together with progressive features. While a country may be going through a genuinely revolutionary process, at the same time there will be a need for hospitals, orphanages and other similar institutions. The Church has, admittedly, played a positive, prophetic and constructive role when she started these institutions several decades ago. However, care must be taken that these institutions are not perpetually concentrated upon to the detriment of involvement in a movement for social justice and liberation.

These institutions were initiated at a period when the situation in our country seemed to call for them, and were a result of the pioneering spirit of the Church which saw the real need for education and health care in our country. However, if we are to be realistic and see what is the greater need in our country today, it is not so much an education and health system in our cities, for these can very well be taken care of by the State and other organisations. In the scheme of priorities, the Church has to ask itself whether its first responsibility is not to those whose education and health are totally neglected. The greater imperative of today is the relevant and meaningful education and the establishment of a less sophisticated community-based health care for the millions of neglected people in the rural areas of India.

There are many Church organisations which still work on the assumption that society is static, that the poor shall always be with us, and that those who are better-off will find their salvation through their concern for those who are not as fortunate as them. The motivational force for working with the poor is sympathy. There is a tendency to cater predominantly to special categories like orphans, the physically handicapped, destitutes and victims of natural calamities. These are not to be neglected, indeed, but they seem to be chosen because they are easier to deal with than those who are directly oppressed and exploited. The



attitude and mode of operation of those running these institutions is by and large, paternalistic, ensuring permanent dependency.

## 2. The Production Approach

Another category of Church organisations, which constitutes by far their majority, adopts the production approach. According to these organisations, the cause of underdevelopment is the under-utilisation of existing resources. They believe that an increase in production will lead to a better redistribution, if the process of distribution of the surplus is ensured through legislation. They are unaware of or ignore the exploitative divisions that exist within any one village, and try to improve the standard of life of a entire village community. Obviously, in such a process, the richer and more exploitative sections of the village do get much more benefits from the programmes than the poorer and more needy people.

An objective critique of their analysis would show that the reason for underdevelopment is not the under-utilisation of existing resources. Rather the reason is the injustice permeating the whole system. Poverty is not just insufficiency of basic necessities, but rather a result of the unjust hold that a small elite of the country have on all the resources, and their grasping of all the economic and social benefits that derive from the utilisation of these resources. To describe poverty realistically would be to say that it is caused by man's inhumanity to man!

Too often these Church organisations have a view of the poor that is derogatory to them, and we make bold to say, to the Creator who made them. They see the "poor" as passive, apathetic, distrustful and having a fatalistic "resistance to change". Consequently, there is a certain element of aggressive paternalism towards the poor manifested in the pressurised approach of these Church organisations.

A further category of Church organisations in India, allied to the previous category, also start on the basis of maximising production. But they aim at bringing it about through skills-formation among the exploited classes or the establishment of cottage industries for their benefit. They have built up their concept of development on two premises : First, they hold that poverty is caused because most people do not have adequate skills to participate meaningfully in production.

Secondly, they hold that alternative means of employment have to be found within the present structure.

Like the previous category, this one, too, does not seem to be aware that this approach is only a reformative one, based on the assumption that the present system is a good one and all it needs is a readjustment and greater efficiency. These organisations have not sufficiently analysed the structure of our society to realise that what is needed is a transformation of society with a new foundation of justice and respect for the dignity of every citizen as a human being.

The results of the efforts of these technical training programmes are not very encouraging. Their directors and personnel tell visitors very proudly that their students are already recruited by big industrial concerns even before they finish their final examinations. Of course, they would do so, because these concerns are getting ready-made trained apprentices, thus saving the budget that is generally allotted for their own training programmes.

Experience shows that the products of these technical training institutes are co-opted into the big business and industrial firms only to improve the profits of these firms, while getting a small amount of the benefits for themselves. Besides, the youth going through skill-training at these technical institutes are selected mainly from the rural areas. But after finishing their training, most of them leave their villages for the cities where jobs are more lucrative. Hence, the technical training institutes in no way benefit the rural community as a whole. In fact, the villages suffer because of the brain drain caused as a result of the selection by the pastors and parish priests of the "best boys" from their parish or pastorate to go for technical training.

### 3. Cooperatives

Another category of Church organisations also follows the production approach, but believes that production can be maximised through the establishment of cooperatives. Their assumptions are, first, that the poor still have a possibility of improving their situation without the system being disturbing. This possibility is presumed to be cooperativism which ensures economic democracy. Secondly, they are convinced that cooperative ventures are more viable, since the means of production are better utilised, the costs of production are lowered

and the bargaining power of the participants is increased in the market economy.

However, while such an approach may be successful in a country or society where the means of production are equitably distributed, it will not be effective in India, or, for that matter, in most Third World countries. Both experience and research have shown that in these nations which have an unjust distribution of lands and assets, cooperatives do not imply a sharing among equals, but rather, a competition among unequals, with the engendering of more power and wealth in the hands of the rich who easily take full control of the local cooperatives.

#### 4 Mobilising the Grassroots People

A new category of social work organisations has evolved during the past two decades. These groups are very committed to the poor, not only whole-heartedly, but also mentally, psychologically and ideologically. Among these, some groups are constituted by Christian lay people. They see the poor as the subjects of their own development. Their own role is visualised as that of catalysts who do not expect any return for their efforts. They do not in any way treat the poor as the raw material for their own salvation, but as equals, endowed by God with the same human dignity that they possess.

An on-going analysis has led these social workers to evolve and move from welfare and development to mobilisation and organisation of the people. They have realised that the different types of programmes described above, while being pledged to eliminate poverty have, in many instances, gone against the interests of the poor. Besides, these lay people's organisations have realised that the supremacy of economy over all other areas of human life has seriously upset social values.

The prevailing values, or rather, the pseudo-values of capitalism, like competition, rivalry, individualism, male chauvinism, maximising of one's own profit and prestige - all rooted in a pervasive consumerism, - have been were sharpened in the 'beneficiaries' of these programmes due to the emphasis placed by the previous development programmes on economic development. What has been noticed is that as development progressed, human greed has also escalated among those who benefitted by the programmes. In fact, after having attained



a certain level of economic development, they now operate on a relatively smaller scale as exploiters of those who have not benefitted by any development programme.

Faced with this situation, many voluntary agencies, and among them some constituted by Christian lay people, not linked up with the Church, have realised that there was much more to development than economic growth. Poverty, it was realised, was not the root cause of underdevelopment, nor, for that matter, were over-population or ill-literacy, which is often falsely equated with ignorance by the richer section of society. These were only symptoms, and the real root cause, as has been said above, was the injustice inherent in the system on a national as well as international level.

These social workers therefore are looking for a development of the people that would imply their self-reliance, an equitable distribution of the means of production and equal opportunities for all to avail themselves of the resources of their country, implying sharing of decision-making by all the people in the socio-economic, political and cultural spheres.

They see the process of development as a continuous and on-going process, established not by an arrangement made between donor agency and implementing agency, but depending on the rhythm of the people themselves. The ultimate goal of this development process is a society in which every individual can exercise his God-given rights in freedom, justice and peace. The people are to be the agents of this change and must be enabled by the social work organisation to work for their own development and their self-determination in every sphere.

## 5. New Orientation to Development : Towards People's Movements

Many Christian activist groups who follow this stream of thought affirm that they clearly see that their task is to bring to the people with whom they work a critical awareness of the reality of injustice and its manifestations in their own lives. This process of education is to go hand-in-hand with enabling the people to organise themselves for collective action in order to win for themselves their self-determination. It is realised that in order to achieve this, the people themselves have to be genuinely involved in the planning of and the decision-making involved in the programmes.



Development is a process of liberation of man in his totality, and not just as a socio-political entity. It can be achieved by a movement which is carried out and increases extensively and intensively by participating and self-determining communities of the people. Movements do not emerge by themselves, nor are they natural events. They must be initiated, catalysed and mobilised. The activists, who have opted for a genuine development process, see as their first and foremost responsibility the undertaking of this initiation, catalysis and mobilisation of movements through the organisation of the poor. The goal of these movements will be to remove injustice, exploitation and oppression. In the process, as an outcome of the movement and integrated with it, the people will themselves become articulate and determined, and will initiate the appropriate steps for a more fulfilling human existence.

Obviously, such a movement cannot develop within the context of small isolated projects. Such segregated projects which try to overcome existing power structures are an irrelevant trap providing only short-term satisfaction or an illusion of power. Such groups can easily be dissolved by existing pressures and structures. We have to work towards building up a large network of groups that have a common vision, goal and strategy. However, the danger must be recognised that a structure that is big can easily become alienated from its objective and at least partially turn into an end in itself without being functionally related to the cause of the people's power.

Some of these Christian groups are beginning to realise that what has been considered to be the goal of development namely, 'Social transformation' is too distant a view and has only the force of a cliché. A more concrete and meaningful objective is the empowerment of the people. This means that through the process of awareness building, organisation and concerted activity, the people gain in recognition of their own abilities and skills and recognise that the rich and powerful depend on these abilities and skills. It means enabling them to achieve their democratic rights in a non-violent process because of the united strength of their numbers.

A word of caution given by a non-Christian, is worth noting here. "We must be careful," he says, "to ensure that our work of building up numbers in people's organisation does not become a primary goal, for

it is easier to go to the organisable, leaving aside the poorest, and consequently prolonging the situation of injustice which is precisely what we had set out to eradicate in the first place!"

## 6. Economic Programmes in the Development Process

This emphasis on awareness building and organisation does not mean that economic programmes have to be totally done away with. After all, the basic and real felt need of the millions of our people below the poverty line is an economic one. But, for a long time, quite a number of action groups had dismissed economic projects entirely, as only perpetuating the existing system. Their focus was only on education and organisational programmes. They have now come to realise that this has not been effective, because the people, after all their organisational efforts, are still locked up in their poverty.

On the other hand, the larger part of the Church organisations still concentrate only on economic programmes in order to enhance the bargaining power of the people, seeing advancement in skills, livelihood, self-management and community cooperation as important elements of people's development. The education they offer is mainly a sort of functional literacy, which is oriented to making the people more competent in developing their economic and managerial skills.

Both education, which is essentially awareness building, and organisation as well as economic growth programmes are equally needed. Where there is an economic development without an educational and organisational factor to build up a new society, the result is only the creation of a new class of better-off people who have aligned themselves with the rich and powerful, absorbing the value system of these latter, while alienating themselves from the people who are still poor, oppressed and underdeveloped. On the other hand, the programmes of the action groups who concentrate on mobilisation and organisation of the people to the neglect of economic uplift, leave the people with a lack of basic necessities and bargaining power, gradually diverting their attention and strength from the struggle that lies ahead.

A few social work organisations have realised that both approaches need to be worked out simultaneously, using the problems and difficulties arising from the initiation and running of economic programmes as issues to be reflected on, thus constituting the themes and content

for an educational or awareness building process and as focal points for organising the people.

Questions for Discussion :

1. Do you know of any development programmes run by a Church or Church organisation? What approach is it using? Is it really bringing about the full development of the poor as persons?
2. Are you aware of any non-Church development programmes? Are they moving towards the total development of the human person?

## Section 2. Obstacles to the Church's Involvement in Social Work

Before starting out on this section, we would like to make a clarification. This section may seem highly critical of the present situation of the Church in India. But, we feel ourselves a part of the Church which we love and anxiously want to see continually renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We love the Church, not simply in the light of what it ought to be, but as it now is, with its need of continual conversion and we do so because we firmly believe that it is instituted by Christ to continue his mission.

Genuine love implies a moving away to a certain distance to derive an objective perspective so that one might be able to see these qualities as they really are, without any emotional or sentimental weightage. It is with this love that we are highly critical of the deviations and additions that have accrued to it because of the vested interests of many who belong to her. We constantly bear in mind the responsibility every Christian has of being a prophet, to show the right way insofar as he can, without pride, or pharisaism, so that this conversion of the Church be arrived at in some measure.

There are a vast amount of statements promulgated by the official Church on the responsibility of the Church and of Christians to working towards social justice in the country and about the approach to be taken in helping the oppressed and poor in India to bring about their own liberation. But despite these statements and the trends towards a new theological and developmental orientation, we are faced with a realistic problem that in most of the dioceses in India there is a widespread and glaring contradiction between the progressive statements of the Church hierarchy and the development activities of the Church. What might be worse is that we find cases of strong opposition, and even hindrance, to the involvement of Christian individuals and action groups of committed Christians in movements of the poor by the official Church.

Quite often, though, bishops are open to change, but it is the diocesan boards or councils that create difficulties against an approach away from relief or developmental services.



## 1. The Mission Compound Phenomenon

The reason for these negative attitudes is not any bad faith or obstinacy. They are rooted in the origin and historical development of the Church in India. When the Christian faith was introduced into the Indian missions during the previous centuries, it was transmitted to the new converts together with the social and cultural elements in which it had been nurtured through centuries in the Western world. This implies a negation, and even a destruction of aspects of local culture in the new mission communities. Instead, the missionaries built up a mission-compound ambiance, in which the communities of new converts lived together in a cultural setting that was foreign, in financial and social dependence on the missionaries, segregated from their non-Christian countrymen, lest they still continue in what the missionaries considered pagan, heathen or even diabolical customs.

Even after their mission-compound complexes were no longer maintained and the faithful have now for many years intermingled with other fellow countrymen, a mental and cultural alienation still prevails among a large number of Christians, and to a great extent, in the Church's official mentality. The mission-compound experience has left a scar of a grave indifference to the needs, problems, sufferings and issues with which their non-Christian neighbours are grappling. If there is a case of injustice to Christians, like the molestations of nuns in North India at the moment of writing, the Christians will rally in their thousands to protest, but will be absolutely cold and indifferent to the mass molestations of tribal and dalit women in various parts of the country.

With the large number of institutions in the field of education and health, and with other privileges brought in or built up by the missionaries in the past, indigenous Christians in many places still live in isolation and have developed a particularist mentality. These and the aspect of the institutional nature of the Church have led to a phenomenon of parochialism which has its impact on the development programmes of the Church.

The Mother Churches in the West helped these new Christians with what they needed for their sustenance and development through aid sent to the local Churches for schools, hospitals and employment opportunities. As a consequence, a deep sense of dependency on and even subservience to the Western Churches and culture and towards the

missionaries grew among the new Christians. This has, in a number of places, still continued, together with a complete absorption of culture, values and attitudes of the West. Unfortunately, this attitude of subservience has now been transferred to the resource agencies and their representatives who visit India.

## 2. The Institutional Church

The Church in India has, due to its historical origin, developed a strong institutional framework. We must bear in mind that for any charismatic message to be sustained and passed on to posterity, as also to have a certain uniformity and discipline among its members if they grow to be large in number, a certain amount of institutionalism is necessary. However, the way the Church in India has become institutionalised is not through a natural growth from a charismatic message to a movement and organisation. It has rather received the element of institutionalism at the very outset, as an imported feature from medieval Europe. Hence, it is based on a well-defined hierarchy with an emphasis more on administration, uniformity and legalism rather than on the formation of a living dynamic Christian community. It is this hierarchy that assigns positions to individuals, which positions in turn give specific powers and privileges.

When the missionaries handed over these positions to local leaders, they felt it was necessary, in the interest of the stability of the young churches, to see that these new incumbents would maintain the status-quo. This tradition still continues, and many Church leaders are still selected on the basis of their adherence to a theological orthodoxy derived from Western theology and their emphasis on the duty to evangelise, with very little relevance to the actual situation which prevails in India. Their orientation to the pastorate and the socio-economic and political environment is still along the lines of the separation of Church from State, and the sacred from the secular.

"Religion is like the Roman god Janus. It faces both ways. The message is a promise of freedom : a song, a dance, a challenge, a celebration. But as believers strive to spread the message, they build institutions. Institutions are necessary but dangerous. Each time we try to share on a bigger and better scale, we reinforce institutions. They take on a life of their own.

They require stability, protection to grow, and so gradually they become rigid. They start to support the 'status quo'.

"Again and again, to be true to the message, we need to take distance from our institutions, to return to the source of living water. The first period of building is beautiful. All are involved, creatively and constructively. But let us watch for the moment when the structure becomes more important than the goal, when the church makes us forget the kingdom. Time, then, to return to the message."

Anne Hope

Within such a framework of opinion and attitude, most Church leaders do not feel the necessity to analyse the present socio-economic, political and ideological forces that are at work in India or to understand the implications of these forces. They seem to be under the impression that the Church institution would be strong enough to withstand these forces. They are carried away by very simplistic notions about society and carry on a pastoral ministry which expresses itself in a paternalistic attitude to the poor and is a close affiliation to the rich and the powerful.

The Church should be a community guided by the Spirit of God through the charisms that contribute to the service of the people. When the guidance of the Holy Spirit is ignored and gifts are controlled for the sake of external convenience and the upholding of the status quo, the Church is impoverished and its vitality is killed.

This institutionalism is a heavy barrier to a real developmental approach. It has led to a dereliction of active concern for the plight of the oppressed and downtrodden. Many are the issues and events in recent history that manifest this lack of concern. The Christian leaders of India, by and large, fell in step with the declaration of the oppressive state of Emergency in 1975, and only raised a voice of protest against it after it was terminated with the fall of the Government. The collusion of some Kerala Church leaders with the previous Karunakaran ministry vis-a-vis the fishermen's struggle, the de-recognition of the Young Catholic Workers (Y.C.W.) by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, instances of greater patronage to independent fundamentalist and traditional seminaries and a deliberate avoidance of progressive seminaries for admission and training of ministerial candidates, are only some events that show the closed attitude of the leadership of the Churches in India.



These events sharply point out the status-quo stance that most of the Christian Church leaders in India retain, in spite of the fact that very many radical statements have been released by them from time to time not only on the diocesan, but also on the national level. It is commonly remarked by Christians and non-Christians alike, that the Christian leaders are quite indifferent to the various burning issues of atrocities perpetrated on the weaker sections. They have practically nothing to say about the heart-rending Bhopal tragedy, the cruel murder of the Sikhs in Delhi, the systematic silencing of political activists and leaders of civil liberties movements, the numerous atrocities against the Dalits by the higher caste people, etc.

The decision-making power in the Church is in the hands of the hierarchy, with very little sharing of this power with the laity. If at all any of the laity have a share, they belong to the few dominant groups of land and estate owners, upper class urban executives and upper caste elements in some states in the south and the west.

The structure of the parishes is feudal and male-dominated, with the clergy keeping all power in its hands and denying actual participation to the majority, with not an iota of it to the poor. Women contribute their mite in varied services, but are kept out from decision-making, and have practically no role to play in theological reflection and in the ministries of the Church.

### 3. The Church in India is not Identified with the Poor

All this indicates that the institutional Church is intrinsically woven into the Indian society, replicating its feudal, capitalistic and semi-colonial structure. It is not the Church of the poor. Besides not demonstrating its concern for the poor in a concrete, active way, it has alienated the poor in our country because of the style of life of its leaders and the wealth it possesses in the form of land and assets.

The alienation of the official Church from the plight of the poor is seen most strikingly in its attitude to the Harijan Catholics. On March 21, 1989, about 120 Harijan Catholics from a village near Tiruchi in Tamil Nadu sent a letter to Pope John II alleging caste-based discrimination in their church. They were being kept out of the church, denied participation in church services and proceedings, all because they were considered 'untouchable' by the majority in the parish!



An article entitled "Children of a Lesser God" by K.P. Sunil appeared in a leading national weekly, "The Illustrated Weekly of India", on June 25, 1989. It described the plight of the Harijans of one Christian denomination in Tamil Nadu. The data provided was extremely shocking, and unfortunately, some members of the clergy, besides a bishop, affirmed that this kind of data could be found in other Christian churches as well!

Today, the dalit Christians suffer a five-fold discrimination. They are discriminated against by the Christian community, by the hierarchical Church, by the government, insofar as they do not have the privilege of reservation in education, employment opportunities and economic benefits that other dalits are guaranteed by the Constitution of India. They are also discriminated against by the upper caste in the Hindu fold, and even by Hindu dalits. In fact, while dalit Christians enjoy none of the privileges of their Hindu brothers, experience shows that there is no distinction made between Hindu and Christian dalits when it comes to discrimination at the hands of the upper caste, Christian or otherwise.

Over-emphasising the institutional reality of the Church, the ones who are in authority over Church structures and who guide the destinies of the ecclesial community, have often endeavoured to bolster it through material resources, and in their anxious quest for security, have given the impression of a worldliness that seems to compete with the multinational corporations. This adversely affects the credibility of the Church when it proclaims its mission to transform the world into God's kingdom.

Added to this, because of the legacy of colonialism, in which the colonisers favoured the Christian missions and enabled them to acquire vast amounts of land for their institutions, many dioceses and Churches are rich. The image they, their leaders and some of their personnel project is that of opulence. This not only alienates them from the poor, but also makes it difficult for them to see reality through the eyes of the underprivileged. This is another reason why the development programmes they plan are not people-based. Rather, they draw on what these officials of the Church, from a remote view point, think the people need. For them, development means raising the living standards of the people, while the people's participation in planning, decision-making implementation and management of the development projects is not considered seriously.

In spite of their manifest profession to radical living of the Gospel, the image that many Christians project is that they have yielded to the temptations of the world and its standards instead of siding with the poor. Serving those in power, the concentration of profit-making and quality education, serving mainly the higher classes have made many Christians imbibe and promote values of the classes which control the lower strata, to the detriment of the poor.

Today, more than ever, there is need for the Church and every Christian to be more committed to the poor and impoverished people in our country. There is need not only for reform but for a process of liberation by which the poor regain their dignity and help to build a more just and fraternal society. In this process, the Church of Christ is, by her very calling, to be fully involved.

In this context it might be helpful for us to recall what was said by the Catholic Bishops of Latin America at the 2nd General Conference in Puebla, Mexico in 1979 :

We affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation. The vast majority of our fellow humans continue to live in a situation of poverty and even wretchedness that has grown more acute. The vast majority of our people lack the most elementary material goods. This is in contrast to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small minority, frequently the price being poverty for the majority. The poor do not lack simply material goods. They also miss, on the level of human dignity, full participation in socio-political life. Those found in this category are principally our indigenous peoples, peasants, manual labourers, marginalised urban dwellers and in particular, the women of these social groups. The women are doubly oppressed and marginalised.

The Church must look to Christ when it wants to find out what its evangelising work should be like. The Son of God demonstrated the grandeur of this commitment when he became a human being. For he identified himself with human beings by becoming one of them. He established solidarity with them and took up the situation in which they find themselves - in his birth and in his life, and particularly in his passion and death, where poverty found its maximum expression.

For this reason alone, the poor merit preferential attention whatever may be the moral or personal situation in which they find themselves. Made in the image and likeness of God, to be his children this image is dimmed and even defiled. That is why God takes on their defence and loves them. That is why the poor are the first ones to whom Jesus' mission is directed, and why the good news to the poor is the supreme sign and proof of his mission. (Luke 7:21-23)...

When we draw near to the poor in order to accompany them and serve them, we are doing what Christ taught us to do, when he became our brother, poor like us. Hence service to the poor is the privilege though not the exclusive gauge of our following of Christ. ... The poor challenge the Church constantly, summoning it to conversion; and many of the poor incarnate in their lives the evangelical values of solidarity, service, simplicity and openness to accepting the gifts of God.

To live out and proclaim the requirement of Christian poverty, the Church must re-examine its structures and the life of its member with the goal of effective conversion in mind."

#### 4. Fear of Conflict

The next most debilitating factor on the part of the institutional and hierarchical Church is a mistaken understanding of the function of conflict. Conflict is thought of as something undesirable and as such to be avoided at all costs. Many Christians, among them even Church leaders, think that change leading to greater can be effected by conversion of heart of the exploiters towards the exploited. But they ignore the fact that at no time in history has social justice been realised through conversion of heart of the dominant classes of society. Rather, it has been realised when the exploited have become aware of their situation and have struggled unitedly for their God-given rights.

When we say that conflict is needed in order to bring about authentic social transformation, we do not imply that conflict means violence, nor does it justify the extremities of violence that have actually broken out in some instances. We would rather stress that conflict or confrontation in itself is not wrong and that violence can be avoided if the exploited are made aware of their actual situation and its root cause, and if they are united and organised in sufficiently large numbers.



"The significant thing about the division between rich and poor people, rich and poor nations, is not simply that one has the resources to provide comfort for all its citizens and the other cannot provide basic needs and services. The reality and depth of the problem arises because the man who is rich has power over the lives of those who are poor, and the rich nation has power over the policies of those which are not rich. And even more important is that our social and economic system, nationally and internationally, supports those divisions and constantly increases them, so that the rich get ever richer and more powerful, while the poor get relatively poorer and less able to control their own future.

My purpose today is to suggest to you that the Church should accept that the development of people means rebellion. At a given and decisive point in history, people decide to act against these conditions which restrict their freedom as people. I am suggesting that unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organisations which condemn people to poverty, humiliation and degradation, then the Church will become irrelevant to people, and the Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful. Unless the Church, its members and its organisations, express God's love for human beings by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against a system identified with injustice and persecution, ... it will die, and humanly speaking, will deserve to die - because it will then serve no purpose comprehensible to the modern world...

The Church has to help people rebel against their slums; it has to help people to do this in the most effective way it can be done. But above all, the Church must be obviously and openly fighting all those institutions and power groups, which contribute to the existence and maintenance of the physical and spiritual slums - regardless of the consequences to itself or its members ... The Church must work with the people in building a future based on social justice. It must participate actively in initiating, securing and creating the changes which are necessary. Its love must be expressed in action against evil and for good. For, if



the Church acquiesces in established evils, it is identifying itself and the Christian religion with injustice by its continuing presence."

Julius Nyerere : Freedom and Development, pp.214 & 220.

"There is no renewal without struggle. It is too easy to say, 'The Church will never change' and then do nothing... 'The Church from above' i.e. most of the office holders are more responsible to the requirements of the institution than those of the Gospel, and pay lip-service to renewal and people's participation in the Church.

Let us apply pressure from below in a spirit of loyalty and stand where Jesus Christ would stand ... Reform for us is not gaining power, but controlling the power of the dominant ecclesiastical bureaucracy." (Hans Kung, to 1800 people gathered together for the Chicago Call to Action's fifth anniversary celebration)

Because of its efforts to avoid conflict, the Church in India runs the risk of becoming flabby and apathetic. Today, more than in the past few centuries, we have a striking witness of the Church being full and vital in other parts of the world. We are seeing the strength of Christian witness in the Eastern European bloc countries where atheism has ruled for generations and the Church has been persecuted. Where faith is real and has been tested and tried in the fires of persecution, the Church grows strong and lively. When that Church says, "We believe in God who is the Lord of all", then the whole world sits up and takes notice. That is a confidence born of God, which is expressed through its readiness to stand up for its principles, and live out its prophetic role of pointing out what is right and what is wrong, without caring for the consequences to itself of its attitude of conflict with power, when that power goes against truth and justice!

## 5. The Minority Syndrome

Another reason why the institutional Church is unable to opt more directly for programmes leading to social transformation is the minority position it holds in India. Every minority group tends to live turned in on itself in an attitude of self-defence, and at the same time strives to assert itself and to demonstrate its presence visibly by whatever means are possible. Many sociologists would say that this is the reason why the

Church has increased the number of its educational and medical institutions.

A further effect of this minority syndrome is that the Church leaders consciously or unconsciously always tend to make the Church correspond to the values of the other systems in the country so as to be able to exist and not to be annihilated by the dominant system.

Here we see the reason why the institutional Church has to legitimise, reinforce and propagate the values and meanings of the prevailing system of power, position, hierarchy, success, profit, efficiency, competition and survival of the fittest. Not only must it legitimise them, but also put them into effect in its own institution if it wants to survive and hold its place in the present totality of the Indian society.

Now the dominant system in India is the economic system of a capitalist type. It is controlled by a dynamic westernised elite whose primary aim is the maximising of their profit. So the smaller systems, like the religious, educational, health and other systems, in order to survive, have to function in such a way as to express and to reproduce the values underlying this system. Those that have opposing values find it extremely difficult to carry on in existence. Hence, they are unable to question fundamentally their country's social structure as it exists at present, but, on the contrary, have to contribute to maintain and reinforce it. In order to be able to do that, the Church, like all other institutionalised religious systems within the totality, is unwittingly pressurised to create meanings which also tend to correspond to the global conditions of the functioning of their society in its present structural set-up.

## 6. Theological Orientations of the Church

The theological basis of the official Indian Churches in general, too, does not help them to become agents for social transformation. The mission that the Church has received from Christ is to be a leaven and light in order to enable the world to fulfill God's plan through its ever-changing and ever new situations. There is no doubt that the message of Christ is capable of transforming the present unjust system and its value system and bringing about a society of love, equality, fraternity, justice and solidarity.

However, the Church in India, by and large, has not fully incarnated this message. The Christian teachings that the missionaries brought to

this country had been inextricably mixed up with the cultural ethos of their mother countries. When the missionary movement started, right up to very recently, the salvation of the individual was the only thing that mattered. Hence the message brought to India and other mission countries was concerned mainly with individual salvation.

Consequently, social liberation found very little place in the corpus of Christian teaching in these Third World countries. The Church's understanding of the Gospel was more in terms of saving individuals from the world outside and bringing them home into the "ark of salvation". As a result, these mission Churches have not been able to move easily towards the new orientations of theology which look for the liberation of the poor and underprivileged and for social transformation. It is only recently that the communitarian dimension of salvation is universally emphasised.

It is also noticed that in many parts of India, because of a strong influence of the Western Churches from which some missionaries came to our country, there is a tradition of a rather fundamentalist trend in some dioceses. This trend is geared more to a theology of certitude and has no place for a theology of searching, of risk or, much less, of failure. Its theological approach is joined to a certain fear that with another approach which involves an element of conflict, certain privileges which exist and are taken for granted, may be questioned.

If a new theological line is accepted, it would mean, as one church leader told the writer, "we will not have the right to continue living as we have been, and we shall be forced to change!" The urge or desire to change has always been and will ever be one faced by resistance, both on the individual and societal levels. But the important thing to bear in mind is that Jesus demands conversion not only of confession, of head and of heart, but also of praxis - a total moving away from whatever is self-centred and unjust, from indifference and lethargy to the building up of his kingdom of justice and peace, of love and understanding, of mercy and solidarity.

However, this praxis is not easily accepted, for it would also mean that values which have now become traditional, namely those values, deriving from capitalism, like consumerism, competition, prestige, self-aggrandisement, etc., and other aspects of Western civilisation have to be subjected to a critical evaluation. All conservative tendencies are



engaged in preserving the life style they have grown accustomed to. For them, sin and evil are not recognised in the realm of economics. Rather, they would find sin mainly in the sphere of sexuality and in the legalistic observance of ritual.

Theology and theologians in India have, on the whole, failed to face reality and to incarnate the Christian faith in the actualities of our Indian situation. Theology if it is understood correctly, is a rational reflection on a lived faith. But how many theologians have tried experientially to live their faith in an authentic Indian community, in a genuine Indian cultural ambience, and then tried, with the community, to reflect on their lived faith? This would have been the start of a real Indian theology with contextual authenticity!

Often stereotyped formulae and cliches have been pretexts for escaping the responsibility of facing up to the facts and to those who hold the reins of power in the Church. Servile conformity to a system of traditional interpretation for fear of incurring the displeasure of authorities and losing positions and privileges has kept many theologians silent. This silence has contributed to the justification and the consequent perpetuation of injustices and has encouraged authoritarian practices.

## 7. Lack of Sufficient Analysis

A very common weakness that leads to deviations from the authentic development priorities and policies of some Churches in India is the lack of a previous sufficient analysis or the lack of an on-going deepening and contextualising of the original analysis with which they started the programme. Added to this, a greater percentage of these Church organisations manifest a lack of clear conspectus for the future.

Because of the absence of a real analysis of the structure of our society, these Church social service agencies do not see the real root cause of the underdevelopment and oppression which prevails. Even if they do, because of the force of their ecclesiastical institution, whose wheels grind very slowly, they are unable to tackle the issues that are relevant at the present. Their sight is focussed only on the present, hence they follow an ad-hoc approach, which may seem very pragmatic and appears to be leading to immediate results, but may not be effective in the long run in view of enabling the people to achieve greater self-reliance and power.



A non-Christian social worker of repute who is constantly in contact with various development programmes in India and abroad complained that "If you ask me about the Christian programmes I know of, I can say without hesitation that most of them are not based on an in-depth analysis. They may be based on the 'felt needs' of the people but not on analysed needs. Very little attempt is made to find out whether the implementation of a particular programme will ultimately help the weaker sections to gather enough momentum firstly to retain the gains out of the programme or even to steer themselves upstream subsequently."

Survey and programme planning, more often than not, tend to be more alert to the reaction of the donor agency than the people concerned. Consequently, many of the Church social service organisations tend to develop sophisticated programmes which do not allow the people's organisation to have its natural organic growth.

A clear vision and coherent ideology are an essential factor for authentic development. As one social worker picturesquely said, "Many forces have been on the battlefield, but were not winners because they lacked a strong ideology." Their grassroots work may in some instances be remarkable, but because of a lack of overall vision, they achieve nothing in the line of social transformation. Rather, they often become a screen or even a force that orients the people in the wrong direction. They are, to quote one social worker, "building roads, but not knowing where these roads lead."

This lack of analysis has had and can still have grave consequences for the Church's social work as this extract from a statement by three hundred priests of Brazil stresses:

"It is in the framework of paternalism that many people, including church authorities, approach present-day realities and social problems. ... They establish countless charitable organisations, social programmes and money campaigns. They universally launch philanthropic initiatives that are dear to the middle-class, because the latter can thereby work off their feelings of guilt and the responsibility they bear for the gap which separates their standard of living from that of the impoverished people around them. People try to alleviate the effects produced without tackling the causes behind them. In practice, the

Church's line of action makes her an **accomplice in the brutal exploitation** of the people and in the misguided effort to solve poverty and illness on an individual level."

#### 8. Isolation and Lack of Unity

Another problem is the lack of unity and collaboration between various Church social service organisations in India. In fact, there is a very definite isolation prevailing among the organisations of the different Christian denominations, almost bordering on rivalry. Sadly enough, this rivalry permeates each single denomination, so that, barring a few exceptions, there is very little coordination or cooperation among the organisations of a particular diocese or region, much less, among the dioceses themselves. Such collaboration would generally be looked upon with suspicion as weakening the autonomy of each organisation, or rather, of its director.

Underlying this isolation is a certain feudal attitude which is prevalent in most development organisations, even those belonging to the Churches. It has been noticed that very often, when a person in charge of a development organisation receives the necessary funds from a resource agency for running its programme, he feels a sense of power over money as well as over people. He hesitates to share his ideology and his handling of the finances to others, because this would mean a sharing of his power. Without any cynicism, we can affirm that he becomes a sort of "petty feudal lord". With this mentality he tends to become a boss of his organisation. He replaces the landlord, money lender and the panchayat officials who used to behave like despots to the villagers, for whose development he is supposed to work, and he looks on other development agencies as "rival kingdoms".

This was very clearly manifested in an incident where we were involved in an evaluation of a development programme. We found that one village was struggling with a problem which had been solved a little earlier in another village in a different programme in the same district. We suggested to the director of the programme we were evaluating, that he could send a delegation from the village where the problem existed to visit the villagers who had solved the same problem. Through a discussion with these villagers, they could perhaps find a way to resolving their own difficulty.

The villagers were sent and they discussed with the other villagers and found an appropriate solution to their problem. But promptly, a letter was sent from the director of this other organisation, asking the first director how he could dare to send his people into the area of his programme without asking his permission. Ironically, both the directors belonged to a network of voluntary agencies, founded to improve cooperation among these agencies. One of these directors, -the one who wrote the letter of protest, - was the treasurer of this network!

## 9. Alien Model of Development

A problem that exists in many programmes in India is that these are not patterned on an indigenous model of development. After the Second World War, the Western countries were rehabilitated through the Marshal Plan, by means of the import of institutions and of an economic system from America. When these countries initiated a process of development aid for the Third World in the Sixties, they believed that the same approach would be effective. They therefore followed the general development trend of transferring of institutions, especially like technical training schools, and others that had been successful and relevant in the First World, expecting them to be as relevant to the Third World.

Influenced by the First World as well as the Church in the West, the Church groups and other groups involved in development work in India, as in other Third World countries, willingly accepted this approach. For example, they took up the health system that came from the West and was adopted by the Indian government, and even ran them better than the government. The traditional community-based health system which relied almost entirely on indigenous medicines which had stood the test of centuries in our country was totally neglected.

This borrowing of Western approaches to development has continued till today. Not only does it ignore the indigenous health systems, but also all other development and community oriented approaches that might be perhaps more effective. We are all aware of movements that spring up in various parts of the world, as it were spontaneously, capturing the imagination and enthusiasm of the grassroots people and spreading over a vast area. Such, for example, were the movement for freedom in the Philippines in 1986, the Chipko movement in India and those of the Blacks in South Africa. These movements developed from



among the local people, without the help of foreign aid or development organisations. They were real people's movements. We ask ourselves why they could be so much more successful than the efforts of so many development agencies who have been working for so many years with a heavy expenditure by way of personnel, energy, time and financial resources. Is it not because they followed a pattern of inspiration and action that was totally indigenous to the people?

We have to admit that in the development programmes of many Church organisations, whether they be aimed at development of agricultural methods, or dealing with community building, construction of houses or even of latrines, the orientations of the programme derive from the West. There are a number of reasons for this.

The most obvious risk in receiving foreign aid is that a local partner will almost inevitably design and organise the activities of his programme to suit the donor. Each foreign resource or aid agency, has its own procedures, priorities, criteria, pattern of decision-making, reporting and evaluation. Most of the Third World partners tend to tailor their activities in the form of a "project" that is, a concise, planned activity calculated to take place over a limited number of years and aiming for certain measurable results. In spite of a latitude that may be offered by the aid agency, the natural stream of improving and responding to an ever-changing environment and to the changing needs of the people is frozen into some blue-print and both donor and implementing agencies tend to restrict themselves to examining whether future activities match the proposed project plan instead of looking at their overall impact, also outside the project.

Such an approach requires a leadership in a voluntary organisation which comes from the higher strata of society, for it calls for a high level of managerial and planning skill. It introduces a way of thinking and decision-making that does not usually help for real participation by the lower echelons of workers in the voluntary agency, and much less by the people at the grassroots. What is worse is that however much insistence is placed on the people's participation, the whole thinking pattern and cultural framework underlying this 'project' approach is alien to the native ethos and mind-set of the rural people of India.

Another problem that can, and in some cases, does arise, is the possible backlash of receiving foreign aid for development. It is a well



known fact of experience that if one has the right contacts or knows how to write a good project proposal, he can have easy access to money from the foreign aid agencies. A statement made by one non-Christian social worker is worth reflecting upon: "so far as the money is coming in, institutions grow, - but not movements. Leadership may grow, but it is not the people's leadership." -

### Section 3. The Role of the Indian Church in Development

From what has gone before, we can draw a few conclusions about the role of the Church in development in India. First of all, we are glad that there are sincere efforts being made by several Christians, and also by Church social organisations to alleviate the condition of the poor. In spite of the difficulties that the Church faces, which we have just elaborated on, there are still Church groups that are trying or beginning to work along the lines of educating the people and organising them. It is evident that their attempts will not be able to go through the full process, for sooner or later, the powerful elite, seeing that the Church, or its members, are involved in working against the system, will launch out on a process of harassment of the Church and bring its activity to a halt.

Therefore we feel that the lay people who, independently of the official church, are conducting development programmes can have a greater hope of lasting out. By far, many of these are aiming at an authentic development, which is oriented to enabling the poor and oppressed, the neglected and underdeveloped segments of our population to achieve their own self-reliance, and to regain their human dignity.

The other sector involved in development is the official, or what we might term the institutional, Church. As has been indicated above, the institutional church is, by and large, still locked up in various forms of relief and charity. Its primary concern is pastoral, and nearly all the Church authorities see development activities as a means of enabling the Church to grow. They also still see development aid from abroad as a means to continue the strengthening of institutions in the Church. Also, among a number of them, non-Christians are still not seen as participants in their programmes, except as potential Christians.

The Church's social work programmes which have moved forward from relief and welfare are mainly economic growth programmes. Experience throughout the whole country shows that economic programmes on the whole have a high mortality rate. It is very much doubtful if these programmes are really leading to genuine community development.

However, there are some Church organisations that have started making serious efforts to involve themselves only in education and

organisation of the people. Once these people are organised, they are helped or encouraged to approach the various Government agencies for resources to build up their own programmes, or to obtain amenities like drinking water, electricity or irrigation for themselves. But, these processes will necessarily be limited, for once the people see the need to struggle and protest against the injustice in the system, against the landlords, the money lenders and the politicians, all of whom hold power in society, the repercussions of these can be very negative against the organisations which are encouraging the people to enter into such struggles. Can the official Church afford to or dare to be in solidarity with the people in such a situation?

### Exercise on The Vision of the Church

#### Things required:

Large sheets of paper for drawing posters as required by group or sub-groups. Felt Pens or paint or poster colours.

#### Procedure:

1. If the group working on this book is large, it could be divided into sub-groups of fives for this exercise.
2. Each person thinks for a few minutes about the Church as he or she has actually experienced it. Each one can jot down a few notes or draw a few images.
3. Each group will share their ideas and make a common drawing of the Church as they have experienced it.
4. Then each thinks individually for a short while and the sub group makes a second communal drawing of the Church as you long for it to be.
5. When drawings are completed, each group sticks their two pictures side by side. All the participants take a Gallery Walk so that each gets an opportunity to see all posters and ask questions of other groups.
6. In the whole group the following questions will be discussed:
  - a. What are most striking similarities and the most striking differences in the posters?
  - b. What are the implications of this for me? For us as a group?

We suggest that the facilitator or the group leader allow a short time of quiet silent reflection, perhaps an opportunity to walk outside before sharing this last question.

Models of the Church (cf. Avery Dulles : Models of the Church, Gill and Macmillan, London, 1976.)

The Church can be seen in each of the following ways:

### 1. An Institute of Salvation

Motto : You are Peter, and on this rock..

The emphasis that such a view has is of the Church the means of salvation. This goes with a sense of separation from the world and that of superiority to it. 'Outside the Church there is no salvation' This institute of salvation is expected to provide a clarity of pronouncements on faith and morals.

The Church itself is a political power. Besides concordats and contracts with states, there is an influence on politics through Christian parties. There is a strong anti-communist trend in this way of seeing the Church.

Social work is seen as a means of gaining merit for heaven, The poor are there to provide the occasion for acquiring this merit. Hence works of charity and relief are practiced.

This attitude is common in most traditional congregations and denominations.





## 2. Mystical Communion

Motto : 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of you'

This way of seeing the Church is current among charismatic groups and congregations as well as among pentecostal groups. The Church is seen as the body of Christ and people of God. The emphasis is on openness to the Spirit. Together with this, exists a real concern for each individual.

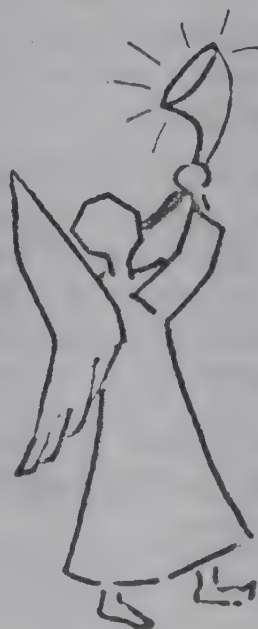
This vision of the Church sees politics as a worldly and dirty affair, to be shunned as far as possible. The Church has a spiritual mission and must not interfere in politics. It is the duty of the State as God's instrument, to guarantee law, order and tranquillity.

Like the previous vision, this one also sees social work as a putting into practice Christ's commandment of love. Social work is to be reformist. Class conflict is denied, and social change must be brought about through reconciliation, never conflict.

## 3. Herald

Motto: Go out into the whole world and proclaim...

This vision is present in many reformed Protestant churches and missionary congregations. It lays stress on the prophetic role that is



given to each Christian, to denounce evil and announce the good news of salvation to all peoples.

It professes the theory of the two kingdoms. Politics is the domain of the rulers, but God is in control.

Social work is a preliminary step to evangelism and must be primarily oriented to spreading the good news and making followers of Christ.

#### 4. Sacrament

Motto : You are the light of the world

This vision came to the forefront in the first half of the sixties, with the Vatican Council, and through the direct or indirect effect it had on many Christian denominations. It is prevalent in a great part of the Catholic Church, as also in other denominations, some of which lay emphasis on the fact that the Church is the sign of God's Kingdom.

This vision of the Church gives importance to the truth that God is at work in the world and it affirms that dialogue with others is important. The church as a visible sign of God's grace, a sign of hope of the new society modelled on the values of the kingdom.

In the world of politics, it holds that the Church should play a prophetic role through what she is and what she says and does. It distinguishes between party politics and social injustice. It shows that an alternative type of society is possible through example of communities consecrated to God by vows.



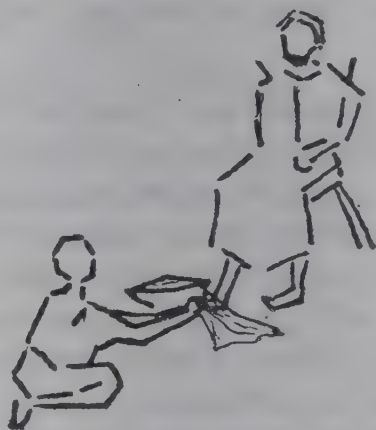
As for social work, it believes that development will come about when Christians and others who believe in God live as signs of his Kingdom practicing the values of the Kingdom, namely, justice, truth, integrity, respect for others, harmony, love, etc. If they live these values, they will naturally bring about justice into the world.

## 5. Servant of the Kingdom

Motto : Let us go outside the camp and share his degradation (Hebrews 13:13)

This vision of the Church has been presented in Medellin and in very recent congresses, conferences and reunions of mainline Churches. It is present in some basic Christian communities and wherever the Church has taken an option for the poor.

It is a pilgrim church, not a settled church; a servant church, not a power-structure; a witness to Christ, not a conformist church; a fellowship of care and concern not just seeking personal salvation.



The Church according to this vision is fully involved in society, not a ghetto. It is a vital, dynamic, joy-filled people, not a white elephant. It reaches out to the outcasts, not just catering to the elite and pious.

This Church is a Body with meaningful participation, not a crowd attending one man's performance. It is made up of a responsible laity, not a clergydom; ever listening, praying, in dialogue, challenging, dreaming, the impossible dream.

This is a Church which is pluralistic and open in its approach, joining hands with non-Christians and so causing a fruitful cross-fertilisation. It realises that God is very much active outside the Church.

This Church is a sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God. and a countersign to casteism, consumerism, exploitation and injustice in various forms.

### The Church

- \* is smaller than the Kingdom.
- \* exists for the world - not the other way round!
- \* points beyond itself - to Jesus Christ
- \* loses itself, like salt, candle, leaven, etc.

Finally, the Servant Church has no culture of its own. It takes root wherever it goes. Yet it retains its basic unique qualities.

It is through involvement with the poor that this Church comes to understand God and Jesus the 'poor servant'. It firmly believes that all creation is good and has been rendered sacred because of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Development, according to this vision is liberation and enabling every human being to take decisions in all aspects of human life. Hence, development itself is political. The Church as a people's church, from below, has to take sides with the poor and the oppressed. It must be ready to die as an institution and forget her own interests. She has to fulfill her prophetic role to cry out in protest to oppressors and to the State if it is oppressive.

"Is not this the fast that pleases me :  
to break unjust fetters  
and undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke.  
To share your bread with the hungry  
and shelter the homeless poor".

Isaiah 58: 6-12

In this perspective of the Church, the Word of God becomes a living and challenging message through the involvement of Christian communities in action that derives its inspiration from the Bible. This is the Church that identifies itself with the poor, and like its Master, comes to serve and not to be served.



## Section 4. The Authentic Church is Community

Would it not be a good thing if, for some time, we stopped talking about the "Church"? This term is too broad, and unfortunately is identified with only a part of what the Church really is. It has ambiguous worn-out resonances and is heavy with alien connotations. When taken as an organised religious society or an institutional religion, the Church shares in the double character that other religions have. A religion can on the one hand, represent the heights of the spirit and be a liberating agent. On the other hand, no apologetics can gloss over the fact that in its concrete forms, religion often has its negative side. The Church has produced the loftiest flights of the human spirit, but at the same time, as an institution, has given rise to the most fearful fanaticisms and every kind of human alienation and depravity.

Perhaps, the word that comes closest to the meaning that Christ had in mind when he founded his Church is community, in which all those who are baptised, are the primary members, the People of God. From among these are chosen those who minister, or "serve" them, in the way of building up and sustaining their community. These are the priests and pastors. It is significant, that in the Roman Catholic Church, the one who is to minister to the whole Church, the Pope, still signs himself, "Servus servorum Dei" : 'servant' of the servants of God!

According to the intention of Christ, the Church is the People of God, who are the community of the disciples gathered by and in the risen Lord. In this community, there is no difference between Greek and Jew, master and slave, male and female, as all are one in the Lord. Consequent on this reality of the people of God, we realise that participation is an important requisite in the Church. This participation must be both within the community and outside. Within the community participation in decision-making becomes a corporate responsibility. Those in power in the present situation have to recognise it and accept the collegial bodies from Synod to Parish Councils and other agencies not as merely consultative, but channels of participation in decision making.

As to external participation, Christian people should participate and collaborate with the wider community in the urgent task of building up a just and humane social order and discover in the concrete context the implications of their faith.

Such an understanding of the full community calls for a reconsideration of the present ministerial structure : participation in the selection of candidates for the ministry, accountability to the people regarding the exercise and duration of ministries. The prophetic ministry of the Indian church calls for an appropriate formation of religious and clergy. Normally, certain virtues (obedience, conformity, submission, silence, patience in suffering...) are recognised as virtues becoming a good seminarian or religious. Certain other virtues (like protest, confrontation, resistance, spirit of questioning) are looked upon as unbecoming of them. Both groups of virtues have sanctions and rewards. Which are the virtues held in high esteem in our formation houses? There seems to be an ideological domestication of our trainees to be subservient. The prophetic mission seems to call for the second group of virtues.

The Qahal Yahweh (Hebrew for "Community or People of God") of the Old Testament came into existence when the slaves in Egypt started their struggle for freedom under the leadership of Yahweh. Involvement in such people's struggles will help the church to realise its identity more authentically and transform its own structures into a healthy renewal of itself.

The church is also a worshipping community. This worship is celebrated not only in ritual and sacrament, but also in the day-to-day work and struggles to attain fullness and to transform the human community into the household of God. Hence participation in people's action for their liberation and trust in his assistance is also a dimension of the liturgy.

He who has a deep personal encounter with the risen Lord cannot but share this experience with others. The Lord invites us to work for the effective establishing of the Kingdom. This implies participation in the struggle of the people who are victims of injustice.

If we are to give Christ to the world, we must, obviously, have first understood both Christ and the world : we must be living the Christ-life in the world. But living in the world means sharing in its social, familiar, economic, cultural and political problems. So to talk about the laity as playing a subsidiary role to the clergy is absurd. For today, it is the laity who primarily are called to be the authentic expression of Christ's mission to the world.

God gave his mission of building up the Kingdom to Christ, his Son. This mission was entrusted to Christ's church. This Kingdom has to permeate every area of human life, whether familial, social, economic, political, cultural. While the clergy are responsible for the building, sustaining and strengthening of the community, it is the laity who are in the heart of all these spheres of human life and activity. They must commit themselves to bring to the fore the values and attitudes of the kingdom in whatever their occupation and activity, whether as doctors or nurses, teachers or professors, managers or peasants, agricultural labourers or landlords, police or politicians, bureaucrats or social workers.

Lay people can exercise a true mission, provided they cease to be tame hangers-on of the clergy. They must be lay people who do not need ecclesiastical structures to help them be themselves and to walk the road of life, people who have discovered Christ as meaning constant risk and involvement. They must be people who aim and actually strive to bring justice and love in whichever area they live and work.

Christ came to fulfill his mission not through the form of a code of laws, but of a concrete model of life together, a model which therefore, cannot be imitated in solitude. The Spirit who aids the individual Christian personality in its development is, beyond all else, gift, and therefore makes of each Christian in his turn a liberating gift to his brothers and sisters.

Christ's mission becomes a reality in the Church only when it is a concrete human group, a human community. Many theologians claim that the Church is a true community and has identity and meaning when it renders an authentic service (*diakonia*) to the world in which it lives as well as a genuine witness of internal communion (*koinonia*), and is rooted in the Gospel message of salvation and liberation (*kerygma*). The Church is its true self when it is a community, and when it transcends itself in order to be a saving word to contemporary man and his world when it manifests communion between its own members, some kind of authentic service to the whole human community within which the ecclesial community lives, that is fully inserted into the social, economic, political and cultural context, and when it bears a concrete witness to the Gospel message to the world by its action and word. Only such



community carries on the *Missio Dei*, or the mission which God gave to his Son, and his Son bequeath to us : to bring renewal to the world.

It might be helpful to reflect briefly on these three fundamental characteristics which make the Church the community that Christ came to initiate.

#### A. Diakonia or Service to the World

The Greek term which the New Testament chooses to apply to a fundamental characteristic of the Christian community is in no way open to an interpretation which implies any position of dignity or authority. Unlike the terms signifying political or ecclesiastical offices, 'diakonia' refers only to the activity of one who puts himself at the service of another.

In the New Testament, the term retains the disparaging connotations it has in ordinary Greek, for it describes the acts a slave performs for his master when the latter returns home : "Prepare my supper, fasten your belt, and then wait on me while I have my meal; you can have yours afterwards" (Luke 17:8); they are services which would not be rendered by a person standing on his dignity. As used by Christ with reference to his disciples, it brings home to us the new and disconcerting nature of his requirements : "Let the greater among you be as the junior, the leader as the servant. Who, in fact, is the greater - he who reclines at table or he who serves the meal? Is it not the one who reclines at table? Yet I am in your midst as the one who serves you" (Luke 22:26-27).

If the Church really wishes to be the concrete manifestation of Christ within history, it must prove the legitimacy of its claim by living as a community for others. "The Church" as a South Indian bishop stated at a public meeting some years ago, "is meant for those outside the Church!" This is an echo of Karl Rahner's statement in *La nuova immagine della Chiesa* in *La chiesa provocata dal mondo*, p.8: "The Church does not exist for itself, but for God, for its Lord, for men, and for men's future" This being-for-others is the content of the service which Christ requires : "If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all". (Mark 9:35); "Whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve,



and to give up his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:43-35 and Matthew 20:26-28).

The Church, if it is an authentic Christian community of people who believe in Christ and are gathered, united and held together solely because they accept him in their lives - it is capable of the maximum of socialisation. In other words, the Church is able to integrate itself fully with the world, serving it in all areas, without any loss of autonomy or specific identity.

More than anything else, the community's service to the world consists in its capacity for involvement, always and everywhere, on the side of the weak against the strong. The authentic Church as a community will avoid the pitfall of taking on the spirit of the environment, acting in the play of political, social and economic forces in such a way that it will always, at just the right moment, join the winning side. Christ's own strategy was the direct opposite, and that is what he wants of his community : a complete independence of all human powers, the poverty and powerlessness which are the conditions of the breakthrough of the Spirit, which places every member continuously and totally at the service of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised.

Service is often the acid test which manifests the true and real nature of the Church as a Christian community. The duty to change the fashion of this world demands, simultaneously a nonconformity to the world. This implies that it works for the preservation and continual reaffirmation of the newness that Christ has brought, and at the same time, is completely inserted into it. We have reason to doubt the authentically Christian character of the Church when it is not possible to find out any new thing the Church can say and is saying to the rest of the world. If it is not good for bringing Christ's basic attitude to God and to mankind to the world, it is good for nothing!

#### **B. Koinonia or Communion with one another and with the Father**

Faith is unfortunately understood in a very truncated or even distorted sense by many Christians. Faith is not just a matter of believing about God, or even believing what God has revealed through his Word and his Church. It is much more than this. It means placing ourselves totally in the hands of God. This is the real meaning of the affirmation made at baptism to the question "Do you believe in God the Father... the

Son... the Holy Spirit..." To believe means that we have given ourselves to the Spirit, who rouses and sets in motion all of our inner energies so that we may at every moment embody in our life the message of Christ.

The kernel of this message is the love of one another. "By this shall men know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for another" (John 13:35). In his First Letter, John describes the three criteria for judging the credibility and authenticity of the Church as a Christian community. It is first a community of those who KNOW Jesus Christ, and this means discovering the newness in him and understanding and discerning his true nature, those who "have heard... seen without eyes... looked upon and our hands have touched" (1 John 1:1).

The second characteristic of the Church as a Christian community is to be united to Jesus who is, as it were, the hub of a wheel to which we are all united as spokes. It is only insofar as the spokes are firmly attached to the hub that they will be attached to one another. The core of our community unity is Jesus Christ. "His commandment is this : we are to give our allegiance to his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he has commanded. When we keep his commands, we will dwell in him and he dwells in us. And this is how we know that he remains in us : from the Spirit that he gave us (1 John 3:23-24).

The third characteristic is the union that exists in the community : the peace, unity, solidarity, joy and happiness that is an anticipation of the total peace of eschatological fulfillment. "One who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. The commandment we have from him is this : whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:20-21).

### C. Kerygma or the Proclamation of Christ's Message

The Spirit who is present in each member of the Christian community makes it a community at the service of God's mission to the world. "To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Put your gifts at the service of one another each in the measure he has received" (1 Peter 4:10).

We have to recall that the gifts that are spoken of are called "charisms". By definition, a charism is a gift that is meant for the service of others. If someone has a gift of healing, for example, it is meant for him to use so that he can help others around him to live in a state of health.

If another has the gift of teaching, it is meant to enable others in the community to increase in knowledge. To use these gifts primarily and solely to increase one's power, wealth and possessions is to act contrary to one's primary mission as a Christian. Nay, even more, it is an abuse of the talents that God has entrusted to one for the sake of the community.

It is clear that whatever talents or competences we have are meant to help others to come much closer to the ambiance of the Kingdom that Christ initiated in this world and which we as members of his Church have a responsibility to build, as far as lies within our potential.

Among all the charisms and services that the Christian individual and the Christian community can offer to the world, the proclamation of the Word takes first rank in the New Testament. The Christian has a duty to make known to all the world the newness that Christ has brought down to earth, the Kingdom in which peace, justice, equality, harmony and love will flourish. But this is not just a matter of preaching, though this in itself cannot be ignored. It is more a matter of showing the reality of the Kingdom through our lives and actions. The early Church demonstrated this very strikingly as we have seen in Acts 2:41-44, 4:32-35 and 5:11-16.

What is significant in these texts is that after describing the unity and love that existed among the Christians, the texts referred to end by saying that because of the image the Christian community projected in the world, "day by day the Lord added to the number of those who were saved".

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. Is the Church, as you know it, giving more importance to the dimension of institution or to that of community? What would be the cause of its current emphasis?
2. What can be done to change the emphasis of the Church, to make it more oriented to being a community? Is this possible in your own parish, pastorate or diocese? What are the difficulties you foresee in bringing about this change? How can they be overcome?



## Section 5. Can the Church Change?

There are winds of change blowing through the Indian Church. We have come across a very heartening statement in "Sharing", a bulletin published by a few priests in Bombay. These priests have this to say:

"All we can say is that the SPIRIT is freedom beyond our calculation,  
leading us to a new creation of genuineness, of authenticity, of effectiveness,  
demanding from us a new mentality, a new style of life, a new praxis, new approaches,  
and  
challenging us to adopt new attitudes, to embrace new relationships, to seek new socio-economic structures and to devise new patterns of human and religious existence."

This sums up very succinctly what the Church in India needs and it is our prayer that this Spirit will blow through the land and fill all its people with His (Her) life and love. Evangelisation would then be the living and palpitating witness of the Christian community, small and vital, to the presence of Christ in the world of today. When non-Christians see the Christian community alive in service, aware of the reality in which it lives and alert in reacting to this reality in order to bring about justice and unity, they will realise that something is happening. This could be the starting point of their turning to Christ, the Christ who is the centre of, the power in and the goal of human history.

"The Church is the salt and light of the whole world. The Church does not exist for its own sake. It has a responsibility to propagate and realise the values of the Kingdom of God in this world, that is in the arena of government, society, economy and culture. The church is the universal and helping instrument of the work of human salvation, she transcends boundaries and limited objectives to achieve the salvation of all humanity.

"The Church, as the continuation of the incarnated Christ, has not got the right to escape from reality or remain silent in the face of injustice and falsehood. The church must spread the



values of the Kingdom of God and in particular, give herself service to the poor and outcasts of society.

"One of the values of the Kingdom of God is justice. Justice is respect for the human personality, the joyful development of humanity, the fair distribution of wealth and the protection of human rights. In other words, man is not to be seen by the Church and the Christian as a unit in a particular society.

"The Church has a mission to promote the common good and awaken in people a recognition of justice. The Church's participation in world reform is an essential element of the Gospel. She must lead the way out of a state of oppression and exploitation towards one of hope and progress. For the Church, therefore, to remain silent in the midst of injustice and falsehood is to make herself an accomplice to the crime.

"The Church must denounce power, wealth and privilege, ally herself with society's oppressed 'little ones', the 'anawim' - and stand up in the face of injustice and falsehood. The clergy and laity must act together to realise this, which is essentially the Church's mission. In particular, she must not resort to exclusion or violence. The Church must forever have love as the basis for all its actions.

"The Church has the unique mandate given by her Lord to promote by word and by action the Gospel values of freedom, fellowship and justice. There is a growing movement among the people at the lowest level of society to fight for the liberation from bondage. In this context, the Church should see a God-given opportunity to provide these people with animators, imbued with the Kingdom values, who will identify themselves with them. She will through these animators offer the people guidance and support without restricting their freedom and initiative.

"The Church will recognise that she does not have the monopoly of guidance and support. Hence she cannot work in isolation but in dialogue with other groups who are working for the liberation of the poor and oppressed. Christianity must give a new vision to these groups. It must also share in their action for liberation and justice. This is the challenge to the Church today. She is to be the harbinger of a new society built on justice, love and peace."

From the Statement and Recommendations of the  
Development Motivation Seminar for the Catholic Diocese of  
Mysore, 2nd to 5th May, 1983:

Questions for Discussion :

1. Is this theological view of the Church as a community current in your church circles - among the pastors? among the lay people? If so, what has been the source of such thinking? If not, in what way is the present current thinking different from it?
2. Do you think that this kind of theological vision is going to be prevalent throughout the Indian church in the near future? If not, when do you think it will take shape? What will cause it to develop and spread in the Church?
3. What could be your role, both as an individual and as a group, in helping others to understand this vision?
4. Discuss the points raised by this quotation. Would you agree with the writer about the new saints, priests, preachers, martyrs, and baptised? Why or why not?

"Though the institutional church is decaying, she is still massive enough to observe the view of a whole world around us slowly materialising as the Body of Christ, with honest politicians for saints, seekers after truth as priests, writers and artists and film-makers as preachers and with flower-children, civil rights marchers and crackpot advocates of total disarmament and world government as martyrs. And the baptised are those who spend themselves in meeting human needs, repairing the ravages wrought to God's creation by the brutalising of man - For all the misery, frustration and anguish of our world, there are forces at work seeking to rehumanise man, restore to him the dignity in which God first clothed him, and revitalize jaded cultures and decadent societies. Christ's NEW MAN does not talk about God but to his neighbour. He seeks God, not by spiritual exploration but by asking questions about the meaning of life."

- Colin Morris in "Include Me Out"

5. What is required of each one of us to be what the writer calls "Christ's New Man"?

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE LAY PERSON IS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

#### Section 1: Transformation through the Christian Lay Person

Transformation is at the heart of Christian revelation. "Behold, I make all things new!" is a statement affirming that the Kingdom which Christ came to initiate is already here. At times in the centuries of Church history, the promised Kingdom of God, spoken of by prophets, and announced by Jesus, was anticipated by most Christians to come only at the end of time in another world. But all the most recent Biblical scholars show that it was the transformation of this very world about which Jesus was speaking of in his parables. His works and wonders are as it were the glimmering light of dawn which heralded the birth of the Kingdom of love, peace, justice and unity in the world of mankind.

To believe this requires a deep faith indeed! For when we read our newspaper every morning, and as we look around at the pain and suffering in the world, it is very hard to accept that the Kingdom has already started. But this faith is inseparable from a hope that 'the way things are now, is not the only way they can be'. This faith and hope are given a realistic basis insofar as we realise that it is WE who are to be the instruments of the building of the Kingdom, of bringing about the necessary changes in the history of the human race.

"Some people see things as they are  
and say, why?"

But I dream of things that have never yet have been,  
and I say, why not?"

As Christians, we look back to the story of Creation in Genesis, and affirm that fact that God looked at all the things he had created and found them very good. He created human beings to continue this work : to fill the earth and take mature possession of it. It is a wonderful world, with infinite possibilities, but which some human beings have made miserable for millions of their fellow humankind through their human greed, callousness and cruelty.



However, it need not be so. The prophets denounced all the evil, selfishness, prevalent in the world. At the same time, they announced a new possibility, and promised a time when the wilderness would bloom, the lion would be a companion with the lamb, and when "they would not hurt or kill on all God's Holy Mountain". When Jesus came he not only promised that the Kingdom was at hand but more, established a new start of this Kingdom by living its values to the fullest and performing wondrous acts which were strong indications of its presence among mankind.

We do admit that there really are winds of change blowing through the Church. But, as we have seen in the last chapter, there are many obstacles in the present make up of the institutional Church, that prevent it from working effectively for social transformation. Unfortunately, precisely because of its institutional nature, it is compelled to alienate itself from those who are working for social transformation, when their involvement with the world and struggle for justice would imply confrontation with the power-that-be. "It becomes more evident", says a note circulated by a few priests belonging to a Catholic religious order, and working with the oppressed fishermen in Goa, "that the Church as an institution which continues to maintain its roots in the law of the wealthy, cannot provide the support to independent Christians who stick out their necks in favour of the oppressed".

The question therefore comes up is "In what way therefore can Christianity be an influence for social transformation?" We believe that it is the lay person who will be Christianity's effective instrument of change. Not many years ago, the spirit of questioning in the Church was faint, practically non-existent. The Christian lay person believed that his role was to be "on his knees before the altar, in his seat before the pulpit and with his hand in his pocket before the priest," (Quoted by Yves Congar in "Lay People in the Church"). The lay person believed in the infallibility of a sacrosanct "Holy Mother the Church" and left all thinking to Rome, Lambeth or other well established Christian centres. This old image of the Indian Christian still persists, partly because the bishops who claim to speak for their 'flock' still speak in the idiom of the past.

In the past, the laity became very passive because they were so dependent on the clergy. As Julius Nyerere, the former President of



Tanzania, said, 'The Church has turned the people into a state of perpetual adolescence.' Unfortunately, the lay man of today is weighed down by a long tradition of indifference and of subservience to the clergy even in matters directly pertaining to the society he lives in. Experience shows that far too many lay initiatives at the parish level, and often even at diocesan levels, are crushed due to the clergy feeling of being threatened by them or not being prepared to shed many of the roles which are proper to the laity. There is far too much talk of lay participation but very little action in this direction. Or, at best, pastors are satisfied with offering the laity a few fringe jobs in the parish, afraid to involve them at a deeper level.

In theory, the lay person in the Church has charisms, ministries, a clear role in the Church. However, in practice, he is the underdog, the pious "yes" man, with no share in decision making. "In any organisation there is no one more impotent than the person who has authority only to make recommendations. The Christian laity are the greatest recommenders on the face of the earth. That few lay people are impotent is a calamity. That 20 million of them are impotent is a crime!... The hierarchy is using the laity like a monsoon umbrella." (George Menezes, *An Address on Christian Solidarity*, quoted in *The Examiner*, Bombay, June 25th, 1983.)

But, recently, through educative seminars, critical awareness building programmes, all conducted in a spirit of prayer and reflection on the Gospels, some change is being affected in this regard, when the lay person is realising in a practical way that he has to be the leaven in the dough, the salt of the earth and a light to the world in which he lives. With the winds of change blowing through the Churches, the laity are called again to participate actively and share responsibility fully in the response that the Christian community is called to give to the needs of its own members, and those of the whole human family.

Today, it is accepted in all the Churches that the primary responsibility in the Church for carrying out Christ's mission to bring about social justice will be that of the laity. Being in the world but not of the world is the injunction of Christ not only to the priest, pastor and religious but to every Christian. The layman being more in the world, more in contact with its works and groups, has a greater challenge to live fully

in the world, not of the world, nor to be taken in by its false values premises.

Being incarnated in the world, like Christ, the lay person is given a greater opportunity to really understand and become critically aware of the real situation of hunger, inequality, exploitation and corruption in the world, while at times even being a victim to these realities! It is therefore a great responsibility of the layman to witness by his life and example to the values of the Kingdom, above all, of love and justice, in order to counteract the false values and promises of the world. This witness will be first manifested by his deep and mature faith and his concern for unity, cooperation and a spirit of community with all who are struggling for justice and equality.

One of the most encouraging signs is that the Church in some parts of India is slowly waking up and bringing about the growth of groups of mature and committed lay Christians. The discussions and conclusions of the meetings of some of these groups, are also having a constructive reaction from the clergy. They have forced priests and bishops to ask themselves how ready they themselves were to involve their lay people increasingly in the mission of the Church.

There is an urgent need of relevance of the Church, parish and pastorate, priest and pastor, relevance of our faith, ministry and relevance of Christianity in India. One thing we just can't skip in our search for relevance in an unjust and corrupt system is Justice and new structures and strategies for justice. The Church must accept the fact that the one who can primarily make this relevance truly operative is the lay person.

### Questions for Discussion :

1. "The Laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven." (Vatican II Document on the Church, Chapter IV, no. 31)

It may take some time, but it would be useful in practical terms, if each member of the group express his or her profession or occupation and see how he can fulfill this mission in it.

How would you see Christians in the following professions or occupations, namely, teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, housewives, industrial workers, landlords, agricultural labourers, or domestic servants, fulfill this mission drawn up for the laity?

2. One of the members of the group can go through the first part of the Book of Daniel (chapters 1 to 6), and can expatiate to the group how Daniel was a model lay person :

- he was not a diluted clergyman, spouting the doctrines and teachings of his religion to all and sundry in his place of work,
- he did not show any dependence on the clergy for his thoughts, ideology and actions,
- he seems to be the only Biblical character about whom no flaw is noted, though not mentioned in the roll call of faith in Hebrews 11, he is indicated there as one who "muzzled ravening lions",
- he associated with kings and politicians and led a public life,
- he held office, yet his character was never impeached,
- he was someone who lived his religious principles in a worldly situation,
- he did never compromise these principles,
- he fulfilled all his duties in his place of work with sincerity, commitment and whole-hearted attention,
- impressed others of different faiths by his value-system and sincerity in his relations with God and fellow human beings.
- he was concerned that all others were treated fairly and with due respect for their human dignity
- he was a prophetic statesman, it was given to him to study the 'signs of the times', to know the outcome of all the world's boasted kingdoms and to see that the nations would degenerate with political power.

In what way can you, the members of the group, build your lives and actions on this pattern set by Daniel?



## Section 2. A Christian must be a Revolutionary

It is time we examine our Christian faith more closely and seriously. We may say that we show our Christian faith through works of charity, welfare, medical public health and even many development projects for individuals and communities. This is all good. But let us see whether it is really answering the problem, and tackling the root cause of under-development. The Gospel demands this total commitment to the cause of justice, leading to a radical change in society, - to a revolution.

In this sense, revolution is a good word. Let us not have any misgivings about it. The Gospel is revolutionary; the Christian faith is revolutionary. There is no teaching, no doctrine, nor ideology more revolutionary. The teachings of Christianity, the example of the values upheld by its followers and the life style it professes should have changed the world. But it has not done so after twenty centuries of existence. However, we can say without any cynicism that Christianity has not failed, but rather it has not been tried!

We who follow a revolutionary Lord and Master, with a revolutionary Gospel and a revolutionary Christian faith, cannot keep ourselves behind "closed doors". To be a revolutionary does not necessarily mean to blockade everything or join the guerillas. On the contrary, revolution must be brought about in people before it can be brought about in things. To bring about a revolution means first of all, to break all the interior chains of passivity and sclerosis. It means accepting to get involved every day in changing the society in which we live.

Once the Church was a brave and revolutionary fellowship changing the course of history by the introduction of discordant ideas. Today it is a place where people go and sit on comfortable pews, waiting patiently until it is time to go home! If society and its citizens are to survive, a revolution is needed - not a transfer of power, but a radical correction of abuses, and a righting of society according to the dignity and responsibility of each and every human person created in the image and likeness of God.

There is need of a personal inner revolution of each individual. It is a revolution of faith because what is involved initially is our covenant of love with the Father through faithful commitment to Jesus and the



consequent responsibility of allowing the Holy Spirit to inspire us with new orientations to our lives. Christianity must be seen as a revolutionary force. It is never satisfied with things as they are. We are all challenged to be so open to the new life that Christ offers us that we will stop looking for him elsewhere (up there and out there!) and seek him where he really is : in us! We quest for the day when men can say to each of us, "You are the one in whom He has come!"

With Christ as the axis around which we revolve, we will have to make a radical shift in emphasis in our vision of our faith, in our theology and in our value system. It might be very salutary to make a personal reflection on the emphases that we have at present and the changes that we are called to put into effect.

## **Section 3. Needed Shifts of Emphasis in our Christian Vision**

### **1. From the Spiritual to the Whole Man**

Building up the New Community, or Qahal Jahweh, presupposes a certain ideology, an understanding of Christian existence as being nothing else than a taking part in the process initiated by God in creation and oriented to the New Heaven, the Kingdom of God. But this ideology has been dissipated through the ages, so that there has been a shift from the total human person to the individual soul.

Western Christianity has taken up the Greek idea of man, in which man is not an animated body, but a soul incarcerated in the body as a prison or dwelling place. Hellenisation, or the absorption of ancient Greek trends and culture, has led to the focussing on the spiritual dimension and has ignored the material dimension. In this context, matter is seen as evil, sex is abhorrently evil. The highest good is contemplation, cutting oneself away from the world. There is no point in doing social work. "Rather, let us evangelise and save souls instead!" Such a perspective has no room for a holistic mission, but only for evangelisation, without any involvement in social work. And, if social work is undertaken in this perspective, it is only as a means of evangelism and making converts!

But, this orientation is most unbiblical, as is the very term "saving souls"! In the true Christian perspective, material reality is of great significance. "God took the slime of the earth and fashioned from it the human body and breathed into it the breath of life". The Incarnation of the Son of God, as we have said before, has put the seal of sacredness on the material world. The Bible speaks of the whole man, speaks to the whole man, and is the unfolding of God's plan for the whole man.

### **2. From the Individual to the Community**

In Scripture, the human person is essentially communitarian. Salvation comes to the whole community, the "laos Theou". The individual by himself has no meaning except in a community. We cannot encounter God or Christ, except in a community.

But this emphasis has sadly been lost. Our whole life seems to have become terribly individualistic. We think of salvation as an individual's

business, and of evil as related to individuals. Our whole value system is centred on the individual, whether in our family and social life, our education, our work, our progress, our security or our leisure. The Christian of today seems to have thoroughly integrated himself, - and herself, - in what we may term the "Walkman culture" symbolised by the individualised sound system that enables the individual to cut himself off from everyone around him to listen to music and enjoy it entirely on his own!

This individualism extends to possession. Private property is looked upon as an inalienable, absolute right. For the Bible, however, there is no such thing as the absolute right to private property. All property, even though it may be owned by individuals, has a social dimension.

Because of this individualistic emphasis, our notion of society is distorted. We see society as a collection of individuals, each having an independent existence. As a consequence, we believe that the only way to change society is to change individuals.

But society is a structure which is made up of individuals not isolated, but linked up, connected to one another by political, social, cultural and economic relationships. We cannot change individuals unless we change structures, else the very structure will bring pressures to bear on the individual to make him regress back into his original state. This is the reason, by the way, why it will never be possible to change an individual in a Church structure whose values run counter to the values you intend inculcating in this individual. No matter how much he changes, pressures in the whole ecclesiastical system will force him to reabsorb the values, - or pseudo-values, - that he might have rejected.

### 3. From Law to Love

During the past centuries, Christians have changed from the attitude and behaviour patterns described in the second and fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. They have gone from love to law. The one thing stressed very strongly in the New Testament is that there is only one value which is absolute : LOVE. Everything else is subordinate to it. We cannot, and will not be saved by law, but by love. (1 Corinthians 13:1 - 14:1)

Typical of the spirituality which is governed by law is that of the Pharisees, with their idolatry of the Sabbath and of their petty rules, regulations and customs. Jesus showed very emphatically that he was violently opposed to this idolatry.

Our attitudes and actions are determined by the unconscious or subconscious image we have of God. It is unfortunate that many Christians see Him not as a Father, but as a just Judge. Hence, they do things in order to be rewarded, and avoid doing things in order not to be punished. Their expectations with regard to God are not of his love, but of his approval. They do not see him as a God who loves unconditionally, but as one who is conditioned by what they do or what they omit to do!

We must never forget that God and his Love are the only realities that have absolute value. Every institution, even the Church, is made for and is subordinate to the human persons who are created to God's image and likeness. To be a slave, unthinkingly following an institution, however sacred it may be, is to live contrary to the Biblical message. Our God is a God who loves, without condition, who loves like the sun, whose rays fall on all men. We may be and are free to shut our eyes to this Sun. The love of God is always there. We can accept it or not. That is our decision. If we do accept this love of God, then we become full of love, and, as a consequence, we will be impelled to be of service to our neighbour. This service must be the natural outflow of our being, - and our being is good when we have accepted God's love, and have become loving persons. The opposite of all this is Pharisaism, upon which Christ expended his anger and wrath, for it is the greatest of all offences to God!

It is because of these three deviations from the correct Christian emphasis that we have forgotten our Christian task of building a new community and working for justice among our people. This has been the great failure of the Christian community, and especially of the layman, namely, that we have become part of the system of underdevelopment and injustice, and by our lethargy and silence, are even accomplices to it. We indeed have the means, the values and the strength of God's aid to change the system, but have neglected these means, nay, even rejected them.

By wittingly or unwittingly distorting the Christian message to suit our own purposes, we have shut ourselves away from the reality that the human person is basically selfless, with an essential dynamism to love



and to be loved, as stated by Augustine of Hippo centuries ago. We have rejected the salvation of the total human person, and have become preoccupied with the spiritual salvation of our people, even we see them grovelling under the heavy boot of repression, beaten down by injustice and scourged by oppression. We have preferred to see individuals, and not the community, in the image and likeness of God. For 'He Adam' the original Hebrew of Genesis for "Adam", does not mean an individual but "humankind" created as male and female in God's image (Genesis 1:26). Finally, we have opted for law instead of love, asking ourselves "What am I doing? What sins am I committing?" rather than "How am I growing in the love of God and of my fellow human beings? " In what direction am I helping others to grow?"

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. As individuals, and as members of a group discussing these questions, what place do we give to material things in our spiritual life? As an example, what is our attitude to food, drink, activities of leisure and of work?
2. While we may have been concerned about others, has our spiritual life been individualistic or communitarian? How have we manifested the social dimension in our spiritual and religious practices?
3. Do we find that our faith has been more built on law rather than on love? If so, how does it show itself? What are the reasons for this orientation of emphasis?

## Section 4. A Revolution in Our Value System

Marxists used to accuse Christians of having no strategy or blueprint to offer. In a way, they are quite right. The Bible does indeed provide us with a vision, but not with a blueprint. Blueprints lead to stagnation. If we have a vision, we can create blueprints, new ones to fit each situation. Our task as Christian lay people is to create a blueprint for our particular society at the present situation.

We have seen, too clearly and sadly, that by not using the Christian vision, and consequently not constructing a relevant and realistic blueprint, many Christians have got involved in development programmes that have not helped in any way to bring about total human development. They might succeed in lifting people out of their poverty, in redeeming them from bonded labour, in making them self-reliant and self-sufficient. But these people in their turn gradually grow to become exploiters themselves, oppressing their erstwhile fellow poor people, who still remain poor.

The cause of this aberration is the failure of the Christian change agent to change the value system of the people he or she works with. They may have improved with regard to their economic, social and political situation, but they are still carrying over with the pseudo-values of competition, rivalry, excessive profitmaking, individualism and prestige, all of which are rooted in consumerism. The Christian worker, imbued with the radical emphasis on the whole human person, on the community and on love, could have aided them to see that the values of cooperation, sharing, service, solidarity, love and simplicity of life style would be the only foundations on which the structure of change can be permanent.

These values of the Kingdom are the best contribution a Christian lay person can make to development and social change. We have to admit that to revive these values is a veritable revolution, for they have been eroded from our present day society with its modernist spirit of materialism and self-centredness. We Christians have unconsciously taken up the pseudo-values on which the present unjust system is built. Our Christian educational institutions have been forced by this system themselves to become its handmaids of this system and help to reinforce these false values.

If we have a wholesome vision and the right values, then we will work for a change of structures and for the elimination of the false values that underpin these structures. This is the revolution that Jesus came to initiate (cf. Luke 4: 16-18). But whether we strive to bring about such a revolution or not will depend on our concept of God, and of the Kingdom which he wants us to start constructing already now in the world.

"Our Father, who art in Heaven ..."

Yes, we pray this practically every day. We say God is our Father. But what kind of father is he? Transactional Analysis speaks of the Parent as being of two types "critical or nurturing". The critical parent is one who imposes laws and rules. For most Christians, God is this kind of parent : one who imposes rules and rewards or punishes according to one's obedience or disobedience of his commands.

But the God whom Jesus manifests is not a critical parent. "He who sees me, sees the Father." Jesus shows himself to us as loving, forgiving, without compromising on the demand of service to his Father through the service of others. "By this shall all people know that you are my disciples, that you love one another." God is shown to us by Jesus as a nurturing Parent who allows the Child to grow and to develop himself.

There are two kinds of nurturing. The first is rescuing. This is characterised by the non-directive counsellor and the social worker who does for the people what they can do for themselves. The second nurturing is the respecting type. It encourages the child to walk on its own, and aids it to use its own will. It respects the freedom of the other, and will not think it has the duty to clear up the mess that others have made.

God is this kind of a father. He is not a magician, a deus-ex-machina, a rescuer. He loves us as adult human beings. Many years ago, a film that came from Hollywood became very popular here in our major cities. It was called "Oh God!". In it, George Burns, a very good actor of his times, acted as God coming down on earth to an American city in the guise of an elderly man. Far from being blasphemous, it gave us all a very good lesson on who God is to us. In it God was very clearly telling us, "You are adults. You have all the resources you need as well as the competences to use them. Now, you do things yourselves! And if you

make mistakes or do wrong, you have the responsibility yourselves to mend your ways and put things right in your world!"

Besides this vision of our Father that Jesus gave us, he showed us the pillars of the Kingdom of God which is communitarian, fraternal and non-exploitative. These pillars are the values of freedom, fellowship and justice.

## Freedom

Freedom implies personal liberation, and is the characteristic of persons who are not coerced by any obstruction that prevents them from being themselves. There is a definite pressure in society, as well as in the Church for socialisation and uniformisation. To some extent, socialisation is necessary to bring up a person according to the norms of the group to which he belongs. But excessive socialisation and uniformisation hinder freedom and are contrary to God's manner of working. His creation is not mass-produced. It is the human being who makes telegraph poles, which can be mass-produced and stereotyped.

But God's creation in nature is totally different. There are no two trees, or even two leaves that are exact replicas of each other. Much less are there two persons who are entirely alike. There is, without doubt, a reason for this infinite diversity. If each is unique, there must be a definite task that he or she has to fulfill in the plan of God for the history of humanity. Each has to make a specific contribution to humanity through the specific talent, gift or ability that he or she has.

There are a number of internal hindrances to this freedom which has been promised to the children of God. The first is compulsions that exist within us, namely, greed, the desire to possess, to own more and more, all of which gravitate to consumerism. Besides, there is the desire for power, ambition, the urge to control and to dominate over others. Added to these internal compulsions are various addictions, to drink, drugs, etc.

Some of these are accentuated by socialisation and the value system of the society in which we live. But it is important to bear in mind that all these are compensations for an absence of love. It might therefore be logical to conclude that freedom can come only from the experience of love. When a person experiences the love of God, he will give a secondary position to all other beings that are created. He is ready to



give up greed, desire to possess, to control. He will even opt for poverty and hardship.

The second internal hindrance to our freedom is fear. Fear of disapproval, human respect makes us hesitant to take a stand. "What will people say?" is the question constantly at the back of our mind. This fear derives from insecurity - we do not approve of ourselves, hence we need the approval of others. Once more, this fear is rooted in the lack of an experience of love.

We have to experience love if we want to be free and if we want to work for freedom of others. How can a person liberate others when he is not liberated himself? Of course, we must realise that both are interconnected. It is not a matter of first liberating oneself and then going on to liberate others. It is in working for the liberation of others that one is able to liberate oneself, and the other way around, in liberating oneself, one is able to work for the liberation of others.

To conclude, freedom comes from love and leads to love. Paul calls the Christian a free slave ( of love). (Galatians 5:1, 13; 1 Corinthians 9:1,19). In surrendering my freedom, I find my freedom. "Who loses his life, shall save it."

### Fellowship

Freedom finds fulfillment in fellowship, in community. Fellowship cannot be forced or imposed. It implies that the community is constituted not by authority or power but by love.

There are two words in the New Testament which express 'love'. 'Philia' which means friendship love and 'Agape' which means effective love, an effective concern for someone, which does something for. "Do good to". It implies not merely aiding, but aiding as well as confirming. Such a love is necessarily universal, since it is unconditional. It is unconditional in the sense that it is a response to God's love (Matthew 5:43-46), and the only appropriate response to his love (1 John 4: 11-12). We respond to God's love, not by loving God, but by loving one another! In my neighbour I encounter God and Jesus (Matthew 25:31 and following).

Such an effective and universal love must lead to justice which excludes making use of others or exploiting them for profit or pleasure. For us today, given the system in which we live, love means justice which involves working to change structures. It is not a matter of asking "What did Jesus do?" That is an irrelevant question since the social situation of his times was very different from ours. We must not imitate, but follow. This means that we have to do what he would have done to confront our situation with values of freedom, fellowship and love.

Hence we see two tasks that are imperative : first, a realistic and deep analysis of the situation in which we are, and secondly, an authentic understanding of the Bible and of its relevance to our times. It might be pertinent to read what Russell Pregeant says in his "Christology beyond Dogma : Matthew's Christ in Process" "A hermeneutical method that reveals the text's relationship to its present and past, but ignores its thrust towards the future, violates that text's very nature to the extent that it implies that the true meaning of the work is thereby exhausted." (p.15)

### Questions for Discussion :

1. Different people have various images of God, which have repercussions on their spiritual lives and in the relations they have with others. For example, some see Him as a policeman, ready to catch them doing wrong, others as a judge, who will call for an account of every small error they have made, others still, as a jack-in-the-box, whose existence is remembered only when they are in trouble. There are others who lock him in their clothes cupboard with their Sunday clothes, remembering him only when they have to go for Sunday service. But, positively, there are indeed some who see him as a Father. What is your image of Him? And more specifically, what kind of a Father is he to you?
2. How do we distinguish freedom from licence? Give examples to ensure that this distinction is clear to all the members of the group.
3. Is your fellowship selective? That is, is it restricted to people who belong to your social and economic class, to your community of origin, to people of your own profession and interests? How can your fellowship become more broad and universal?

## Section 5. A Revolution in our Theological Basis

Our concern for the poor manifests itself in our efforts in development. However, in order that these efforts be effective the Christian has to make certain demands on himself. Development is not just a hobby something one does because he has a lot of time in his hands, something to occupy himself with to earn a living because he cannot get a job elsewhere. Every Christian, by the very nature of his calling or mission, is responsible for the development of others. As the Acts of the Apostles when describing the life of the early Christians, declares :they shared with one another in prayer, in the Eucharist, which as a sign was meaningful only when they shared whatsoever they had 'so that there was not a needy person among them.'

The Christian must have a deep motivation for working with and for his fellowmen so that they can liberate themselves and live as God wants them to live. But that this motivation be unshakeable and constantly stimulating, it must be rooted in a meaningful theological basis. This basis can be found in the four great stages of the history of salvation namely creation, incarnation, death and resurrection. These stages provide very clear guidelines for the involvement of the Christian in development work.

### 1. Creation:

The two Biblical narratives of creation have a single aim: to show that God has made the human person the focal point of all creation. Development, too, has the human person as its focal point. It is not finance and budgets, buildings and institutions, be they schools or hospitals, not big plans and grandiose schemes that constitute development, but giving back to human persons the freedom to utilise their God-given capabilities.

God's work of creation is not ended. He has determined that it be continued through the human beings he has created as "masters of his world" (cf. Psalm 8). Creation is continued when a person works with the things of the material universe to make the world a happier and better place for his fellowmen. When a person helps to build a house, to lay a road, to cook a meal for others, to make a machine, - from a ploughshare to a computer, - he is continuing God's creation, because he is doing



these things that will make people's lives better, more comfortable, happier.

Much more is a person involved in continuing God's work of creation when he is helping other persons to use the faculties that God has given them, which make them God's image and likeness. To help people reflect for themselves, to help them to love one another and form a strong organisation or association to struggle for their own liberation from whatever bonds are hampering them, and to help them to make their own decisions is certainly a very high measure of cooperating with God in His work of creation.

Besides making the human being the centre of creation, God has placed him as King of the universe (Psalm 8). Therefore He has entrusted him with the responsibility of caring for and protecting the things He has created. More than that, it is through human beings that God has planned that the whole of the created world enter into the plan of redemption. As Paul says, "For the created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed... the universe itself was to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God. Up to the present, we know, the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth." (Romans 8 :19, 21-22)

This is a strong indication of the role of the Christian with regard to nature, for the preservation and growth of the ecology and of the animal kingdom. Very few of us realise that this preservation and working for the salvation of God's creation is an important part of our Christian vocation.

God created the universe, the world and the human person, and He has laid the foundation for development. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, has laid the foundation for re-creation, thus making development of the human person really possible. What God in Christ Jesus is waiting for is that his children identify themselves with the poor and needy, commit themselves with heart and soul for their development and to bring about a true revolution of which Christ will be the centre and axis. On our answer and response to this expectation of God, depends the development in the authentic sense of the world of our oppressed millions. We have the solution - but have we got the courage and the determination to put it into effect?



## 2. Incarnation

In order to fulfill the mission for which the Father sent him, which he proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16 -18) the Son of God "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). He identified himself with his people, shared their common life, dwelt in the midst of their shame, sin and exploitation. He was always at the service of the poor, a true man, coming from the lower strata of Galilean society. Friend of sinners, Jesus had compassion for people, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

In development too, identification with the people is of vital importance. The Christian who wants to work earnestly and effectively for the development of his less privileged fellowmen will realise that this identification is absolutely basic and essential.

To put it very bluntly, as long as the Christian, especially the lay person, does not identify himself with the oppressed masses of the world, his activities in development are illusory play-acting. He cannot alienate himself from those in need of development. To declare himself or herself above politics - because "politics is a dirty game!" - is, for the Christian lay person, a running away from a responsibility that is essentially linked up with the calling of a lay person.

In some parts of the world, - and even in our country, - there are dominant groups of Christians who use the Church to defend their interest and maintain their privileged position. Today, as they see what they call "subversive" tendencies gaining ground among Christians who are trying to work for justice for the neglected and deprived sectors of society, they call for a return to the purely religious and spiritual function of the Church. Unfortunately, it is well known that some Church authorities have acceded to their call and restrained those of their flock who are working for development and justice!

Christianity is not an escape from the world. The salvation that Christ brings is a total liberation of man from sin and all its social, political and economical consequences. Unless we take the incarnation-identification really seriously, we cannot begin to imagine what the Church's -and the lay person's - proper action for people's development should be.

It is heartening to note that there have been some outstanding breaks-through in this line of incarnation-identification. Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Rulenge Diocese in Tanzania has chosen to live in an Ujamaa village, sharing in the life and hard physical work of the community. He stresses that living a communal life, sharing material goods is essential for genuine Christianity.

Archbishop Tulio Botero of Colombia, transformed the palace he had inherited from his family into a school for workers and farmers. He went to live in the suburbs of Medellin. He often invited workers to share his meal with him. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Johannesburg, also gave the palace that he had inherited from previous Archbishops of Johannesburg, to be used by the blacks, and his grounds and swimming pool for the children of the poor. Bishop Sales, of Natal in Brazil, stopped the construction of his cathedral in order to build houses for the poor. He also started a great campaign in favour of land reform.

Nearer our doorstep is the example of at least one Bishop in North India, who lives the life of a common worker, shunning the external signs of power and superiority, in imitation of his Lord who washed his disciples' feet. We also have the example of the priests of a parish in Bombay who live in two slums, sharing in the problem of the slum-dwellers, participating in their struggle against slum-eviction, and harassment by police and bureaucrats, and working with them on their own social issues.

### 3. Death

Jesus Christ called for love and justice. His teaching was not acceptable to those who would have him talk innocuously about love and not on justice which is a demanding subject. His act of civil disobedience in driving the sellers from the temple, added fuel to the fire of hate burning in oppressing hearts. Hence they crucified him - for making himself the Son of God, for professing to share God's life - and love - with men, for bringing forgiveness, that is reconciliation with God, which would form the basis for reconciliation among men. They crucified him because he wanted to make the Jubilee principle permanent in the lives of men, as was clear from Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4: 16-18), and his sermon on the mount.

Jesus knew that he was hated by the Pharisees and top Jewish leaders because he identified himself not with them, but with the low and the outcaste. He knew he was going to be killed by them, yet "he set his face to go to Jerusalem". Why? Because of his commitment to his mission of the total liberation of the poor and the downtrodden. It was a complete commitment without reserve to serve the cause of the poor that led Jesus to crucifixion. This was his Father's will from eternity. For this he was sent to the world. He saw his own suffering and death as part of his commitment. (Philippians 2 : 5 - 11)

Commitment means total personal adherence to a cause or to a person, the giving of yourself without reserve to that in which you believe. Commitment is absolutely basic to Christianity and has always been so. A Christian gives himself totally. Christ's call is for a radical departure from old things and an unlimited commitment to the newness of following him. When we see what Christ is, we see that he is the PERSON COMPLETELY GIVEN TO OTHERS, TO THE COMMUNITY, TO SERVING PEOPLE. If we want to be genuine followers of Christ, it is this kind of commitment that is absolutely basic. The measure of our identification with the poor is the measure of our commitment for the cause.

In order to be truly effective, the lay person working for development needs to die to himself, to his tradition-rooted attitudes and values, to his middle-class culture and ways of leisure, to his privileges and acquired needs, and, - especially in many of our Christian communities - to his Western thought and life patterns. He has to undergo this death so that he may enter among the poor and underprivileged, living and bringing to them a new hope and a new life because he shares with them their griefs and anxieties and animates their joys and hopes.

#### 4. Resurrection

In the era of the end of the Old Testament, there was a universal longing for Shalom and for a new age. It was at that moment that Christ came into the world. Jesus' resurrection and the Spirit of Pentecost were decisive evidence that the new age had begun. The victory of God was guaranteed to be completed at the Second Coming, but the witness of its coming, its first fruits was the resurrection of Jesus.



The Resurrection radically transformed the lives of his disciples. Suddenly they came out of their closed doors and began joyfully and courageously to witness to Christ's death and resurrection. They became renewed and transformed men, leaders of a movement which made an immediate impact and went forward with an astonishing impetus. Their faith in the resurrection was the creative starting point of a new sequence of events of which the world soon became aware. It made them new men, but it was also the birth of a new community, or rather, the rising of Israel from the dead, the rebirth of the people of God, as it were.

It is because they spoke out of the very centre of this new creation that their witness carried weight. They themselves had passed through death to a new life. The darkness and desolation of Good Friday and the miserable sabbath which followed it had emptied life of all meaning for them. On the "third day" they were "raised to life with Christ" as Paul put it, and that is a confession of faith hardly less basic than the proclamation "Christ is risen".

The Book of the Acts tells us more about their new style of life and the renewed structures of their community as a result of their faith in the resurrection of Christ, and their sharing in this new life with Christ. (cf. Acts 2:43-47, etc.)

The change in the life style due to the belief in the resurrection was a total and radical change. We may therefore rightly call it "revolutionary". Unfortunately, this good word "revolution" has acquired a negative and pejorative meaning. But the dictionary has as its first meaning: "a progressive motion of a body round a centre or axis." This has nothing to do necessarily with violence, though violence may be the reaction of those rich and powerful people who will lose in the process of things being brought to the right centre or axis. Christ was the centre of the life of the early Christians, and their new life was nothing more than a life around Jesus as its axis. Their life style was nothing else than giving expression to their simple Christian faith in the risen Lord. To be a Christian is to care for men in their concrete and particular needs. Faith works itself in love.

The Christian lay person of the twentieth - and twenty first - century has to rediscover this faith and express it in his love for God through love for and justice to his fellowmen. If he accepts Christ's message in its totality, eschewing the eclectic and innocuous pietism and ritualism that



is peddled today as Christianity, he will have to make a real about-face in his values and attitudes. He will work ardently for the radical restructuring of social, political and economic systems.

Too often, Christians, unaware of the real situation, fail to analyse the structure in which they live. They are, consequently, content to dolo out cosmetic remedies. A parable may make this point clear:

A group of devout Christians were living in a village in the mountains on the bank of a river. This river had a very strong current and was rather difficult to traverse. There was a ferry service that would take people from one side of the river to the other, but it was rather dangerous, and drowning accidents, even fatal ones, were frequent. The Christians decided to act. They pooled their resources to buy an ambulance for the victims of these accidents. They also established a life guard base, with a life guard permanently on duty when the ferry was running. Through these two measures, they saved many lives, even though some were crippled for life because of the battering they had received by the rocks on the river.

One day, a visitor came to the village. He asked the villagers, "Why don't you stop the ferry and build a bridge?" They answered, "Technically a bridge is possible, but it is neither realistic nor advisable." When questioned further, they said that the ferry service had existed for a long time, and besides the village head would oppose any change. He was the one who owned the ferry boats. The visitor asked, "The headman is a leading member of the Church. Can the Church not speak to him? Or failing that, can you not elect a new headman?" The villagers were shocked. "The Church" they said, "is not involved in politics. It is called to preach the Gospel and give a cup of cold water in Christ's name, not to dabble in social and political structures."

As part of the Indian masses struggling painfully towards total liberation, the Christian lay people in India must construct the Kingdom of God from "within history now". Hence they cannot adopt a neutral attitude towards the actual political, social and economic situations in which we live today in India. Insofar as these situations manifest selfishness, oppression, and the denial of human rights, the Christian lay person as being fully incarnated in the world, must resist and denounce them. They must, in keeping with the Spirit of their Lord, continue to thirst for justice, for respect for the dignity of persons, for unity and brotherhood

They must have the courage and conviction to say "Yes" to these values. They have to throw in their lot with the people who struggle for a life based on these values, even though they are not members of any Christian or religious fold.

The pilgrim Church needs the presence of the Lord Jesus in order to live in oneness, to go forward on her journey, to be a redeeming, healing presence. Without Christ the Christian cannot achieve anything in the way of bringing about social justice in India. This will involve hardship, self-denial and perhaps, even the final sacrifice of life for some. But the Christian, like his Lord is called to be broken and bleeding to share himself, to spend himself and to give himself for others in order that all may have fullness of life in Christ. He is to reproduce Christ's life in his own involvement for the total liberation of people which will bring them to experience fraternity in Him.

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. If Christians really lived their sharing seriously according to the spirit of the early Christians, would the Harijan Christians have need of the privileges accorded by "reservation" to those belonging to "the Scheduled Castes"? In such a situation, is not asking for these reservations for Harijan Christians a confession that we Christians are not actually living up to the requirements of our faith?
2. How do you as a group, see the relevance of the doctrine of creation in your own lives? How does a Christian lay person continue God's work of creation in the present?
3. What is the impact of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ on your lives as Christians? What implications do these truths have for your involvement in your work for social transformation?
4. "Great Theology must always be paid for in advance by costly discipleship", says Methodist minister, Colin Morris. What is the cost you will have to pay to live up to the theology contained in this section?

## Section 6. Challenges to the Christian Lay Person

### Christians and Consumerism

"A man cannot be a perfect Christian - that is, a saint - unless he is also a communist. This means that he must either absolutely give up all right to possess anything at all, or else only use what he himself needs of the goods that belong to him, and administer the rest for other men and for the poor. And in his determination of what he needs, he must be governed to a great extent by the gravity of the needs of others. But you will say it is practically impossible for a rich man to put into practice this clear teaching of Scripture and Catholic tradition. You are right... Christ told everybody the same thing long ago when he said that it was easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

"If Christians had lived up to the Church's teaching about property and poverty, there would never have been any occasion for the spurious communism of the Marxists and all the rest - whose communism starts out by denying other men the right to own property. There is only one true doctrine about property rights ... Those rights exist and cannot be denied, but they imply an obligation which, if it were put into practice without hypocrisy and self-deception and subterfuge, would mean that most Christians would be living with something like the communism of the first Apostles ... No one denied those men the right to own land or to keep what they wanted, or to sell it and give away their money. Yet that right implied an obligation to satisfy the needs of others as well as their own and brought with it the privilege of doing so in a manner that was beyond the strict letter of any law, and which could go as far as a charity that was heroic. If you have money, consider that perhaps the only reason God allowed it to fall into your hands was in order that you might find joy and perfection by throwing it away."

Thomas Merton : Seeds of Contemplation



## Foundation of our Work : Faith in God

"Where oppression and the liberation of man seem to make God irrelevant - God filtered by our longtime indifference to these problems - there must blossom faith and hope in Him who comes to root out injustice and to offer, in an unforeseen way, total liberation."

G. Gutierrez

## Oppression is caused by Sin

"My life has been threatened many times. I have to confess that, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people. I'm not boasting or saying this out of pride, but rather, as humbly as I can ... Now we realise that offences against God bring death to human beings. ... Sin caused the death of the Son of God; sin continues to cause the death of God's children."

Oscar Romero, the martyred Archbishop of San Salvador

## God found not in statues but in People

"If conversion should be a turning to God and neighbour, ... then we must ask ourselves whether we, perhaps, do not show greater respect to images of wood than to human beings who are the living images of God. We must ask ourselves whether we are not more courteous to images than to the human beings who are sunk in ignorance, sorrow, poverty and slavery."

Bishop Leonidas Proano

## Questions for Discussion :

1. Discuss these several quotations. What are the insights you derive from them? How can these be translated into action by you as individuals, and as a group?

2. Coming to more practical aspects of the lay person's involvement in social work,

a. Could not lay people take charge of the social work organisations of the dioceses that are now in the hands of Bishops and priests?



b. What kind of training would be needed by lay people to undertake the running of the Church social work organisations? In what way are the clergy, by reason of their ordination, more competent to be trained and to run these organisations?

c. When Churches in foreign countries send aid supplies and provisions, could these not be handed over directly to representatives of the recipient communities? Why do they have to go through the hands of hierarchical figures in the Church.

d. Linked up with this, a relevant question is: Would the foreign Church resource agencies continue to lend their support to these social work organisations of the Church if they were taken over by non-Christian leaders?

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS A CHANGE AGENT

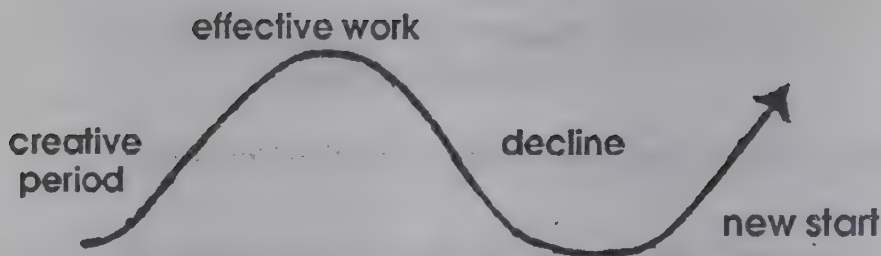
#### Section 1. Working towards a Basic Christian Community

However committed a Christian lay person may be to the cause of the poor and oppressed, he will realise by experience that an individual, all by himself, can do nothing. In fact, working alone in this sphere will lead to nothing but frustration. It is only when a group of people who have dedicated themselves to the cause of the poor, work together for bringing about social transformation and social justice, that there can be any hope of success.

There will be a further assurance of success if this group, besides being dedicated to justice, has reflected deeply on its faith and has tried to see the close relationship of Christian teaching and the Bible with the mission to work for a just, participatory and sustainable society. Obviously, such reflection will necessarily be linked up to prayer and a dependence on God's grace and strength to continue in the challenging effort to struggle with the exploited poor for justice, peace and love.

The group which has been working together on the material presented in this book has by now certainly developed an esprit de corps and a sense of Christian solidarity. During the several discussions held in the previous months, there will have been ample opportunity to build up a spirit of trust, because these discussions have given everybody an opportunity to share something of themselves and to start getting to know all the others in a human and personal way. We hope too, that without any express directives given in the book, some of the discussions and reflections will have led to common prayer. Having got together regularly to discuss, reflect and pray, this group is, undoubtedly, quite ready to turn into a basic Christian community.

Any group which has been working together for a relatively long period of time will most probably follow a long-term pattern which is diagrammatically expressed thus:



When it starts, the group, which may or may not have had the intention of forming a basic Christian community, but in actual fact is just a group of people gathered together for a common purpose, is enthusiastic and creative, and bent on working out its purpose. This is followed by a phase when it operates efficiently. But some time later, a new phase arises during which it declines. This is an occasion for the group to rethink and reformulate its purpose, and start again on a new upward creative phase. If it is unable or unwilling to do this, we believe that in all honesty, the group ought to be disbanded.

Within this long-term pattern, and often during a single meeting another pattern may emerge, which is that of dependence/independence/interdependence. Every human life follows this pattern, for the child grows through adolescence and into responsible adulthood according to this pattern. It is interesting to note that it is re-enacted within a group situation, where it has to be lived through again and again.

How often we find a group of adults, newly arrived at a conference where they are strangers to each other and to the chairman and staff, acting like children with an exaggerated dependence and obedience. After a while they are quite likely to challenge the platform, or to become worked up about some detail of administration in a way out of proportion to its importance. They may insist on some change in the programme, but once they have won a victory and made their mark and discovered that the chairman is fallible, they will settle down to work together as responsible adults. In some mysterious way, the group has to relive this universal pattern of human development in order to grow.

It is important that the facilitator of the group be aware of these processes. He or she must enable the group to pass through them and so to develop and grow. In no way must he be a leader, for the concept of

leadership is a very individualistic one, keeping the greater part of the responsibility of decision making, planning, teaching, controlling, etc., as the monopoly of a single individual. The group should have a democratic structure, in which these tasks are shared by common consent. One of the group who has the competence, could be appointed facilitator by the whole group, on the understanding that this is not a permanent assignment, nor that of a leader.

It must be admitted that a new group will not be able to see clearly this distinction between facilitator and leader. The facilitator will be taken to be a leader at the outset, no matter what protestations are raised on this by him or by other members. But he has to diligently strive to reduce the role of leadership on a sliding scale which is illustrated in the following diagram:



In the initial stages, the facilitator may have to exercise an almost autocratic authority, because the group members feel and behave like children and need to be told what to do. As the group progresses, he will be first explaining his decisions to the group, then asking for their opinions and discussing the question at issue, and finally leaving the decision in their hands.

In moving from leadership to facilitation, as the group advances towards adulthood or regresses towards childhood, the facilitator may have to bear a lot of pain. The members of the group may project on to him their own fear and aggression, their guilt or self-hatred. They may attack him for something which they fear or dislike in themselves - and because the facilitator is human, they are probably right in spotting this weakness in him. The facilitator, therefore, cannot simply sit back and think to himself, 'Now they are acting like adolescents attacking their father, but of course the fault is in them, not in me.' The facilitator must rather think, 'the fault is also in me, but because it is in them too, they notice and dislike it, and touch me in the soft spot, and I feel pain.'



At this stage, the facilitator can expose himself to their attack, and at the same time help them to understand why they are attacking him; then he can bring up into the light another area of human nature which the group can share together. They will then be able to accept another weakness in themselves and each other which can be transferred into strength. So both the facilitator and the group members must share in the pain involved in forming the group as a nucleus for a basic Christian community.

The small group is an excellent place where a person comes to new self-awareness. Anyone who relates for a long time with others on a purpose as sublime as the study of God's message and the world in which he lives, is bound to reveal himself to the others. The members cannot go on pretending to one another and hiding what they really are. As they get to know each other, there comes perhaps a moment of irritation, perhaps a moment of deep friendship, when somebody lets slip a truth about one particular person. He feels he is stabbed, as light penetrates into a dark place. Often what is revealed to the others is something they know on the intellectual level, but now they suddenly experience it at the emotional level. It hurts, because what is broken is some illusion about a person which he has cherished, and which seems to be the reason of his being and the mainspring of his activity. Suddenly he is made aware of the dark side of that very virtue on which he prided himself.

No doubt, disillusion is in the end healthy, because to live under an illusion is both harmful to ourselves and destructive to others. But the moment of disillusion is dangerous, and is generally followed by depression, and can lead to the feeling of disorientation and lack of control. At such a moment a person needs to be supported by the group. The other members can help him to come face to face with a new area of his personality's own ambivalence, and accept it, and find a new integration of himself round a new centre of truth. This is a kind of death and rebirth, a crisis in which the inter-locking of good and evil is transformed by death and resurrection.

Self-awareness goes hand in hand with awareness of others, and so it is that in the life of a small group, a person can discover the depth and complexity of his relations with other people. It is through the life of a small group that the members come to a deep and existential realisation that each one is dependent on each other.

Part of group life is tension, and the clash of personalities. Nobody can avoid it. Every good group or team which is going to be creative must experience the clash of personalities. This is so painful that many groups disband, and return to the simpler style of operating as individuals. But if they can face their own doubts - the betrayals which go hand in hand with their loyalty to each other - if they can dare to express their anger and despair to each other (not as accusations, but in search for forgiveness), then they may be led through an experience of death and resurrection by which the good and evil within them may be unlocked. Then they may begin to discriminate, and to understand how the evil in one, activates the evil in the other, but that at a deeper level, there is a reality and a timeless present in which the true self of the one is united to the true self of the other. Out of such an experience of forgiveness, which may be on a little scale and often repeated, they can arrive at a new understanding of their interdependence.

It is in the small group that we are confronted by the total reality which is myself/the other/God, and where the different aspects of prayer take on a new quality. We can be silent together and come to know each other more profoundly than through words. We can utter needs, or our thanks, not in lengthy prayers but in a phrase, a mono-syllable, somebody's name or need dropped into the silence, caught up in the flow of the river. We can study together, sharing not only our intellectual ideas, but our imaginative insights. Above all, we can act out the story and the symbol of forgiveness in its original simplicity. This is the moment when the group is metamorphosed into a basic Christian community. (cf. Stephen Verney: "Into the New Age" Fount Publishers, William Collins, Sons and Co., London pp.112-123)

## Section 2. Functioning Basic Christian Communities

### A. The Church and Basic Christian Communities

Even though the Church is gravely weakened by its institutionalism, there is a growing number of pastors and the laity who are desirous of change, who are weary of endless compromise and diplomacy, who feel that extreme brutalising, oppressive poverty degrades both God and the poor. It is the Church of the underdog, no longer to be distracted with visions of heavenly after-life for suffering, borne here and now, for it sees that there is sufficient material plenty for all. It is from this church of the people that basic communities will rise. These churches, especially those constituted by the grassroots communities, will be Christ's 'good news' to people, which will help them to realise that they count and that they ARE the Church. Admittedly, it will be difficult to get such communities off the ground. To expect basic communities to spring up overnight and complain that nothing is happening in the pastorates, parishes or dioceses is to be very unrealistic.

All of us have to work in the new direction we have set ourselves and agonise over the new type of 'church' that we want. In a way, our whole image of the church as a huge, monolithic edifice and structure with directions always coming from the 'top' has to undergo a radical change. The Church in India is still very much a clerical church, with the lay people dependent on the clergy to a shocking extent: "Reverend, please find a boy for my daughter", 'find a house for me' 'Father, please get a job for my eldest boy', 'are there new openings in the Gulf for my husband' etc., etc.

It is high time that we, lay people realise that we, and not the clergy and bishops alone, are the church. With the small communities, we, the laity can be helped to come into our own and take responsibility for our actions and for the church. The pastor and priest have, more and more to devote themselves to the breaking of the bread and to be animators and catalysts, rather than to usurp the domain of the laity.

The Spirit of God is quietly at work in all the continents, and it is now possible to talk of such small 'communities' in Africa, Europe, Latin America and parts of Asia. It is in these groups that people are beginning to feel that they 'belong', to gather together to joyfully celebrate the Eucharist, to involve their brothers and sisters of other creeds in building



up a world where human dignity is not just a polite word, social justice a trite slogan, nor fellowship a euphoric feeling. We need to thank the Lord for the marvels he is doing in our day and seriously ask ourselves as members of the Church what we can do to build up small groups of committed Christians and others.

## **B. Initiations to Basic Christian Communities**

A study made in a diocese in India disclosed that there are a number of basic Christian communities functioning in it, though, some of these would not fall strictly within the definition of a basic Christian community.

In this diocese, the majority of the groups have concentrated on Christians alone, but there are two groups that also include non-Christians. These two have their prayer and reflections besides structural analysis and work with the poorer sections in their localities, but their prayer and spirituality is what they term "a secular spirituality" which derives from the sacred writings of various religions.

The starting points for the Christian groups varied. For some it was the desire for a meaningful celebration of the Eucharist that initiated the group and brought it together. The study of the Bible has led others to reflect on their Christian mission and moved them to form a community. The distance from the parish church has forced some people to form a group which comes together in a sub-unit to celebrate the Eucharist.

These groups are all just two to three years old, hence in the first stages of their growth. They have various degrees of involvement. There are those which are mainly Eucharist centres that only meet to celebrate the Eucharist and sacramental life in small communities, to make these service more meaningful or because they are far from the parish church. Some groups are Bible study groups with the Word of God being the motivating power to build up their community. Most of these small groups, cannot technically be called basic Christian communities, because their meetings are not directly oriented to any community action.

More within the scope of a basic Christian community are those groups, which, besides celebrating Eucharist and sacramental life, are involved in works of charity, e.g. organising for spiritual and social development, conducting free tuition classes, taking care of the health and hygiene of the locality, reaching out to slums, organising Christmas



trees for children, giving employment, visiting families, organising Alcoholics Anonymous groups, etc. But these have not got the infrastructure nor the intention of deepening their faith through serious study of the sources of the Christian message. Ultimately, without this foundation, their activities may possibly turn out to be routine-like mechanical tasks which gradually become devoid of the personal love and relationship with those they help.

The groups that add this dimension of study and reflection to the prayer-life and acts of service, more through education and organisation of the people rather than mere welfare and service, are genuinely basic Christian communities. But as yet, no groups which came within the diocesan study we have referred to, have either the infrastructure nor the desire to embark on such a process of deepening of their faith in the light of the present situation. It is to be hoped that with the right guidance and the competently trained lay facilitator, some of the groups will rise to this level.

Finally, the ultimate level to which the groups can function realistically in our pluralistic Indian situation, will be that, besides concentrating on the Christians, they are in process of building communities with all those around, belonging to other faiths. Their starting point is the concrete economic, social and political need of the people and the duty of the Church and the Christian to respond by spreading the human values of freedom, fellowship, equality and love and thus be the sign of salvation to all..

#### Questions for Discussion :

1. What can be the starting point of a basic Christian Community?
2. What is the common element in the desire for building Christian Communities?
3. The values of the Kingdom hold priority and are the chief motivating power for launching out on a basic Christian community. What are these values? How can they be developed in us? Would it not be presumptuous to call them "Christian values"? Do non-Christians not have these values? Would talking about the values of the Kingdom be more meaningful? Why?

4. Should the initiation for building a basic Christian community come from the needs of the lay people, or should they be started directly through the initiative of the clergy?

### C. Examples of Actual Basic Christian Communities

We are convinced that the formation and on-going animation of the Basic Christian Community is a ministry of priority in the given situation of India. It is more and more being realised that each country has to slowly and prayerfully work out its own 'model' of such basic Christian communities. The Church in India has to evolve its own type of 'basic communities' determined by the concrete local situation. No model from abroad can be inflicted on us. Here comes the importance of reflection, study, while keeping one's eyes open to what is being done elsewhere. This is the challenge facing the Church in India today. Some efforts that are being made in India and abroad are briefly indicated, not that they may become patterns for imitation, but that they may provide the inspiration for initiating basic communities in our own areas.

#### 1. Forming Communities among the Industrial Workers

"Some of the small, compact neighbourhoods, made up of Christians and others, have been taken as a starting-point. It is worth watching an interesting experiment now being unobtrusively conducted by a young Jesuit priest in the chawls in the heart of the workers' section of Bombay. He, with his team of social workers, is exposing the people, Christians and others to human values. He is at the stage of making people aware of their rights and their unjust situation, organising them to take the initiative in demanding regular rations from the grain-shops, water supply, etc., etc. Where there is a concentration of Catholics he has been taking occasion of their patronal feasts (each floor has its own patron saint) to celebrate the Eucharist in a way that is at once relevant to their situation and open their minds to social and human issues which they are unaware of or too afraid to take action on." (cf. 'Sharing': A Bombay priests' bulletin)

#### 2. Potential Start in an Urban Parish

"In our parish we are also at an initial stage, with priests and parish council giving much thought to starting such communities. We are in no hurry, but would appreciate more help and assistance from those of our parishioners who have ideas and suggestions that are practicable.

Moreover, in going for such 'communities', our whole image of the Church as a rigid structure and heavy on 'institution' will have to undergo a radical change. Much more flexibility and an 'open door' mentality will be called for if we are to avoid 'Christian ghettos' and 'insulated pockets of 'holier-than-thous' in our parishes. In such communities, the poor and the fringe-Christians will be the main concern, moral values far more important than mere religious practice, the Gospel given preference to rigid doctrine as being the norm of action, and in all this, the layman and woman coming into their own. We are now set in this new direction. In this the Holy Spirit will not be a passive spectator, if we really believe that he 'will make all things new'! (ibid.)

### 3. The Communities in Latin America

In Latin America the deep and universally felt concern for the drift away from the Church and the lethargy of the Church to the situation of the millions of oppressed, has eventually led to the formation of basic communities. They are growing to be a large and strong force of dedicated Christians. Our faith and hope in the Church of the future was greatly strengthened when we saw some of these communities functioning in Brazil. Today in that country, there are nearly 50,000 basic communities, which, in the early years, concerned themselves with prayer and worship in groups or social and charitable work in their neighbourhood, but are now - many of them at least - articulately demanding a just society and their rights as human beings.

We are all aware that most of Latin America is nominally Catholic unlike India, for instance, where we are a rather weak minority. But thanks in a great measure, to the basic Christian communities, the Latin American Church, has already given the world hundreds of martyrs including bishops, priests, nuns and lay people, a sure sign of the vitality of that Church.

### 4. A Dynamic Basic Christian Community in the Philippines

In Africa, for example in Tanzania, and in Asia, especially in the Philippines, communities made up of the poor and the marginalised, are also quietly at work, fully involved in the mission of renewal and Christian witness. Throughout the Philippines, in both Catholic and Protestant Churches, there are now Basic Christian Community programmes. The Catholic Church in Mindanao was probably the



pioneer in what has come to be called a Basic Christian Community programme.

Ten Japanese Buddhist monks visited Basic Christian Communities in Mindanao. Here are their comments:

"The Catholic Church in Japan is a church of the rich and middle class. In Mindanao we found a church of the poor: farmers, squatters, workers, - struggling to solve their problems in a religious way... poor people genuinely committed to the work of justice... a gentle, warm people of deep spirituality, even as they fight against the oppression of the powerful... We were deeply impressed... These people really believe in the future.

"From what we saw we can say the Basic Christian Community is not only the hope of the Philippines : such a community is the concrete hope of religion in the world. A religious community mixing faith and concern for justice was the hope of the founder of my sect, Nichiren. I've envisaged such a community for fifteen years. At last in Mindanao I saw it."

The Mindanao Pastoral Council wrote its reflection on the basic Christian communities in the diocese as follows:

"The experience of building Basic Christian Communities in the local church of Mindanao is a solid ten-year accumulation of pains and gains, strengths and weaknesses, encouragements and frustrations. Through it all, we have reached a big number of our barrios and districts in our rural and urban areas.

"...Through our Basic Christian Communities, there has been a deepening in the faith of our people. They have come to realise the need to relate to one another as children of the Father and brothers to one another, and to express this in regular liturgical celebrations revolving around the faith that has long been nurtured in their lives. They have steadily accepted their responsibilities in sharing their time, talent and treasure for the support of their communities.

"...Education for justice has been integrated into their seminars and Bible studies ... In some cases, they have organised themselves as sectors of farmers, labourers, urban poor, fishermen,



tribal Filipinos, towards responding to the total needs of the members. Where they have been harassed through the escalation of militarisation, the incursion of multinationals and corporate farms into the rural areas, the suffocating pressures from the local government and para-military groups, the greed motives of local businessmen and middlemen, communal action towards the defence of their rights has become an inevitable response.

"Thus action for justice has become a constitutive element of their being a Christian community...

"These efforts are not without accompanying risks considering the national security ideology that is so sacred to those who hold the reins of government. Our lay leaders and grassroots catechists are paying the price : martyrdom. They commit themselves to the preaching of the Good News by their example and would rather die than live a life of inconsistencies. In spite of the risks, there is an increasing number of our Kapitya leaders who have made the option to follow Christ to the Cross. And to them, the mystery of Life and Death, the Cross and the Resurrection, has become concrete.

"...However, much remains to be done in the Basic Christian Communities. Towards this end, they are committed :

1. To provide continuing formation to lay leaders and grassroots catechists who can lead their communities towards responding to the total need of their Basic Christian Communities.
2. To reach out to the priests and religious, especially those in formation teams, towards sharing a unified perspective in the promotion of committed Basic Christian Communities. Updating seminars should be promoted among them to cope with the new demands of our Basic Christian Communities.
3. Education for justice should be an integral part of the continuing formation of lay leaders and grassroots catechists and also of all the members of the Basic Christian Communities.

4. To organise the people as oppressed sectors, mobilising their local resources to make a stand vis-a-vis their human rights."

From a Report of the Mindanao Pastoral Council, 1980.

### Section 3. Characteristics of a Basic Christian Community

#### A. Opting for the Poor

The primary aim of every genuine basic Christian community is to live in faithfulness to the message of God in Christ. This message, as has been stated above, is given a specific orientation by the current issues that face us. These issues are the 'signs of the times' through which God challenges His people. The issue that is most striking and universal is the poverty and injustice to which so very many people in our country and in the world are victims. Hence, it is essential for any basic Christian community to be deeply involved in the struggle of the poor for justice.

If a basic Christian community is motivated and inspired by the Gospel, it will necessarily have what is known as the 'Jesus Criterion' by which we understand the option taken up by Jesus. And we know that he clearly opted for the poor in his earthly ministry. His Nazareth manifesto expresses this option clearly. Besides, the works he did are enough proof of his option for the underdog.

Following this, every basic Christian community has no other choice but to be fully concerned with and involved in the struggles of the poor in their immediate locality. This the members of the community do not because of any ideology, but because they are motivated and infused with the same Spirit that animated Christ Jesus.

Three characteristics will mark the option of the basic Christian community for life with and in the poor :

1. The members will recognise that the poor exist. This may seem to be a rather naive statement. But it takes on meaning when we realise that to the centres of power, the poor do not exist, - they do not count. The basic Christian community considers the world from the point of view of the poor, their existence, their struggle and their culture.

2. The members of the basic Christian community cannot accept the systematic elimination or death of the poor. They will agonise over the reality prevailing in India where the centres of power find thousands of technical, economic, ideological and theological reasons to justify or tolerate the death of the poor.

3. The basic Christian community will join in the struggle for a global organisation of society that will assure life for all. Its members will strive to discern the truth or the error in every theory and project meant for the poor, to see whether they kill, usurp freedom and participation, and make the poor dependent on the social worker, or even on the members of the basic Christian community, or on the contrary, whether these theories and projects really bring life in wholeness to all.

The basic Christian community ought to work out a vision and strategy to give life to the weakest. If the basic Christian community wants to reorganise society, it has to give power to the people so that they can fulfill the Genesis promise which means not just conquering the earth but by working in peace and harmony with nature, and in cooperation with others in a spirit of socialism and democracy. It must help the people gradually to gain control over the means of production, participate in the distribution and use of goods, each according to his needs and of his family.

#### **B. Celebrating the Word of God in Daily Life**

The centre and axis of the being and activity of the basic Christian community is Jesus Christ. The Christ-centred life of this community comes from a new grasp and understanding of the life and mission of Jesus in the light of the basic Christian community's social and cultural context. This is made possible by greater acceptance and deepening of the knowledge of the Word of God and of the reality of the world.

This means that the basic Christian community draws its constant force and inspiration from its study of the Gospel in an existential way so that it is translated into vital modes of action and behaviour and brings alive an encounter with God and each of the members of the basic Christian community. Because of the way in which this study will be conducted, prayer and worship, and even Eucharist celebrations will form the natural contexts for the celebration of the Word of God by this basic Christian community.

#### **C. Community transformation through praxis**

In the meetings of the basic Christian community, the events that take place in the world and in the area in which it is located are regularly analysed. The analysis aims at perceiving the reality, the systems, structures, ideologies, etc., that lie behind the facts. This analysis is



reflected upon through the mirror of God's message, so that the faith dimension is brought to bear on the events.

This analysis and reflection will lead the members of the basic Christian community to commit themselves as a community to action that effect change in the society of which they are members. This action will in most cases, not be possible only by the members of the community. They will work in unison with other people, individuals and groups, of various faiths, who are already involved in working for the cause of the oppressed and exploited people in the area.

It would be a matter of grave concern and a deviation from the very essence of the Basic Christian community if it were composed of mainly some middle class Christians with time on their hands for indulging in a new spiritual fad! This would make it deteriorate into an exclusive club. Sadly, too many Christian movements of the past few decades have degenerated thus. It would take on a more realistic meaning if the poor, the neglected and marginalised were taken into the group as members with equal rank and capacity in decision-making.

Ideally the basic Christian community should be composed of the "anawim" that is, the underprivileged and exploited people themselves who had originally got together to deepen their awareness of the problem and organise themselves for action on this problem. Those well-to-do persons who join as members should see their role as "helpers" rather than leaders. This requires a great self-abnegation and humility, but to the extent that they exercise these qualities, will the groups really become genuine basic communities.

These economically and socially "better off" people have the role of initiating these groups. They must help the group to incorporate Biblical study and to make an in-depth analysis of their situation. In this they must not be teachers, but be ready to learn from and with those who are poorer than them. The action of such a community will concentrate on the efforts of the poorer members in the struggle to free themselves from the exploitation under which they are and to liberate themselves to live as full a Christian and human life as they can.

With due reflection and study, this group can be a well informed and theologically oriented Christian group. That this is possible is beautifully exemplified in the classical book on the Biblical formation

of a basic Christian community "The Gospel in Solentiname" by Ernesto Cardenal (published by Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, in four volumes). In it we find the recorded discussions on the Gospel conducted by the ordinary "uneducated" people like farm labourers, artisans and housewives.

Once this group has gone through such a programme of study and reflection, it is in the best position to confront various institutions where it feels that justice is not done or prevented, even if they be church institutions. The team could reevaluate them in terms of the liberation thrust. But, as a matter of strategy, it is advisable to build up support first, lest the group find itself isolated and crushed by the very power of the institutions.

The group can also initiate awareness building processes through the existing institutions, e.g. parishes, seminaries, schools, etc. This can be done by creating conditions, raising questions, providing eye-openers, exposures. Keep in mind that the institutions, by their very nature, resist awareness building and change. They actually serve the dominant class.

As a potential or active basic Christian community, it must play the prophetic role essential to it, namely that of denouncing and announcing, breaking and building, planting and uprooting, in terms of value systems, and in situations of crying injustices. It will bring pressures of love and justice to bear on the world and the Church around it.

Finally, it will re-work its personal and group life style and value system. This life style must be the result of its personal involvement with the grassroots people, its experience of the liberating God in the midst of the poor. Without this experience and involvement, any change of life-style will be artificial. Constant and regular evaluation of its activities, attitudes and value system is essential for the vitality of the group. Without this evaluation, it will soon fizzle out.

Basic Christian Communities can help people's participation in political action. People in a group experience greater strength and courage to face obstacles than as mere individuals. A net-work of such grass root communities could also be the pattern of alternate political constituencies which can get voice and power through such small units.

#### D. A Specific Spirituality of Service

Today, in the deeply entrenched culture of consumerism, Mammon seems definitely more attractive and more concrete. His presence is very much felt and respected in Europe and North America, and we in India tend to follow the pattern set by these continents! Besides, Mammon has a bigger voice and a stronger grip on his servants. Hence, there is need for a counter-witness through service and simplicity. The foundation of the spirituality of the members of a basic Christian community is Servanthood, which is so strongly expressed in Isaiah. The Christian who binds himself in servanthood to God and his people must have only one prime loyalty - only one master!

A significant trait of this servanthood is faithfulness to the master which is manifested by a love for others. This relationship, too, has been clearly depicted by Jesus in the parable of the unforgiving servant, who was forgiven a large debt by his master, but was ruthless in demanding the repayment of a small loan by his fellow servant.

The love for others goes out of its way for those in need, like the love and concern shown by the Good Samaritan. But we must note that the compassion we have for others is not limited to a single act. Rather, it is an attitude and an orientation in life which is a continuous part of one's life-style. At the same time it is a love that does not patronise or reduce the other to an attitude of beggary. It expresses itself in preserving and respecting the human dignity of the other.

Jesus has clearly shown us by his own example that such a spirituality of servanthood rooted in love requires of us a heavy sacrifice of self. Jesus gave a significant example of servanthood when he washed the feet of his disciples before the Last Supper. He also clarified the proper place of servant and master in stating that the disciple is not above his teacher nor the servant above the master. Paul emphatically states this in his letter to Philippians 2 : 5-11 where he says that the Son of God who was equal to the Father, did not consider it an indignity to take the form of a servant and was obedient, even to the death on the cross.

To summarise what has been said up to now, the basic Christian communities are small grass-roots units of faith-affirmation, social awareness, reflection, love, service and participatory action, which provide a context where all other ministries could be effective. For a basic



Christian community, the true living of the Christian faith is even more important than the intellectual acceptance of the true teaching of the church. As the community continues in existence, it should gradually work towards becoming a community of trust in which the participants:

- a. become aware of Christ's presence among them,
- b. reflect on - their own personal experience, and
  - what they see happening in the world,
- c. link this up to the theological teaching of the church
- d. pray, individually and communally, about the implications of the above in their lives,
- e. celebrate both the promise and the experience of salvation,
- f. plan how to make all the new insights, about the role of the church in general and of itself as a community committed to development and liberation, into a living reality in their own situation.
- g. act to bring about justice in the situation they have reflected upon, either by themselves, or by joining hands with others who are already involved in that particular issue.

"The truth is only the truth, when it is lived"

"Charity as lived by a Basic Christian Community can take many different forms. In the first place it can help all to increase their faith, and then, after that, it can be realised in action for the human promotion of oppressed persons or groups, for the integration of those on the fringes of society, for the defence of human rights when these are being violated, for justice in situations of inequality, for the overcoming of inhuman conditions, for the creation of greater solidarity within a given society, and so on. All this, of course, must be taken as a sign of true charity, as described by St. Paul : patient, kind, forgetful of self, caring only for others, incapable of rejoicing in wrong doing; or by St. John : 'A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends'"

Pope John Paul II



### Questions for Discussion :

1. Do you feel that as individuals and as a group, you have sincerely opted for the poor? How does this show in your attitude to the poor, in your life-style and in your actions?
2. Does the Word of God play an important part in your daily life? What can you do to make it more relevant to your life?
3. Have you thought of any particular section of the poor in your locality with and for whom you will work as a group? Do you have any concrete plans in this regard? What are they?
4. What can you do to integrate some people into your group who are poorer than you? What can you do to avoid them feeling 'inferior' or 'just tolerated or patronised'?

What measures can you, as a group, take to live out the servanthood that is so essential for a Christian who desires to follow his Master?

## **Section 4. Forming a Basic Christian Community**

### **A. The Growth of Basic Christian Communities**

The development of 'small groups or basic communities" mainly in answer to modern man's need for deeper communitarian relationships, in the context of the pastoral life of the Christian community, has been hailed as "a building of creativity in the bosom of the Church'. The basic Christian community can be seen as the leaven or the first fruit of an ecclesial model which is more communitarian, prophetic and liberating. We can say that it is the Church at its smallest level. It is in no way a complicated structure. It is simple, but at the same time full of potential and transforming force. (cf. J. Marins : Church from the Roots, NBCLC, Bangalore, 1981)

We can unhesitatingly say that such a community of believers is drawn together by the Holy Spirit to continue Christ's work of liberation and to give witness to the existence of the Kingdom among us. There is no opposition between the task of liberation at any level and the proclaiming of the coming Kingdom. In fact, the most effective way of proclaiming God's Kingdom may be the work of liberation in society.

As Christians, the reality of our faith is that we are called to take an active role in making Christ's promise a reality for everybody : "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) This fullness of life is liberation, a freedom from all forms of oppression : social, economic, political, ideological, and spiritual and more than this. It is transcendence, a new life of love in a transformed world.

### **B. The Community in Dialogue with the World**

To fulfill its mission as a basic Christian community, the group cannot live and act in isolation. She must live in dialogue with the world, listening and learning from the world, and responding to the "Signs of the Times".

From very early times the church taught that God reveals himself to us in three books :

- the Bible
- the Human Spirit (the whole human experience)
- the World (creation)

In the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council stressed very strongly the need for the church to get out of the defensive closed mentality of the Post-Reformation church, where it seemed as 'one had to get out of the world, to get into the kingdom.' The Bishop wrote, 'The church looks at the world with hope and with affection'.

All the churches have by now recognised that their role is to be in meaningful dialogue with the world. This involves not only proclaiming the message but also hearing, listening and learning. And as the Church, no matter of what denomination, listens, the cries of oppression, exploitation and suffering became very distinct. This means that in trying to put into practice openness to the world, the church is being led inevitably to rethink her theology. It was precisely because the Latin American church was listening to the needs of the world, that liberation theology emerged at the meeting of the Bishops at Medellin in 1968.

### C. Total Liberation. From what? Towards what?

Liberation is the centre of Christ's message and of his own mission and ministry (cf. Luke 4:16-21). Liberation theology arose initially from reflection on the concrete human experience that was prevalent in Latin America in the late sixties. Groups of Christians with a renewed interest in the Gospels gathered together and tried more seriously to respond to the needs of the poor. They realised that a great deal of the suffering and misery of the poor was not inevitable, was certainly not the will of God but was caused by the greed and heartlessness of other people. They recognised man-made exploitation and oppression on a vast scale. As they searched for God's response to this situation of human suffering they turned, as we have turned in Chapter Four, to three main sources of influence in the Bible:

- the story of the Exodus
- the Prophets (especially Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah)
- the life of Jesus

As we have seen earlier in this book, these three events in the plan of salvation show God's loving concern for the oppression, his denunciation of oppression and exploitation, his call to justice and his reversing the values of the world through his Son. The members of a basic Christian community must understand very clearly this plan of God for

the liberation of his people and strive to make this plan effective in their lives and their actions as individuals and as a community.

#### D. One in Heart and Mind and Spirit

The members of the basic Community realise from the outset that their effectiveness depends on their spirit of oneness and sharing. It might be helpful for the group to examine the strength of this spirit of unity. That this unity have a firm foundation, the members must become deeply aware of themselves and the other members.

We begin this section with a trust building exercise which can deepen relationships in the workshop community through personal sharing. Two options are proposed. Either one may be done by the participants, or if they want to, they can do both. One of the members will be the facilitator for these exercises.

The aim of both these exercises is the same. It is to help the participants to reflect on their own lives in rather precise way. This personal reflection will not only lead to greater self-knowledge, but also, while being the basis for small group sharing, will result in a greater trust among the group members. Through these exercises, the participants will be able to focus on those events and experiences in which they were most conscious of God's intervention in their own lives and the people who helped them to become the person they now are. A tree or river of life is a story of a pilgrim, moving from the mystery of birth to the mystery of death.

#### 1. The Tree of Life

Procedure:

Each participant draws the tree of his own life

-Roots represent

-family we come from

-strong influences which have shaped us into the person we are

-Trunk represents the structure of our life today

-job

-family

-organisations, communities, movements we belong to

-Leaves :our sources of information

-newspapers

-radio, television



- books
- reports
- friends and contacts
- Fruits : our achievements
  - programmes and projects we have organised
  - groups we have started or helped to develop
  - materials we have produced
- Buds : our hopes for the future

Each individual will work on this for about twenty minutes. In groups of three to five, the participants will share their reflections, if possible in an open ended session when group can go on as long as they wish.

## 2. River of Life

The river is a very meaningful symbol in many cultures, and most people find it natural and stimulating to compare their lives to a river.

### Procedure:

Each person is given a sheet of paper, and plenty of coloured felt pen. Each draws the River of his or her own life, going back to the source (early years), different periods, like quiet peaceful ones, wild stormy ones (rapids and waterfalls)

Major events that contributed to growth of river shown as tributaries which are given labels indicating what event they signify.

Small drawings, showing important persons, events and experiences can be drawn beside the river.

Colours can also be used to express different moods at different periods. The time taken for this exercise can be 10-15 minutes or more if needed by the group.

Subgroups of threes are formed to share the discoveries of the person's rivers. It is not advisable to share in large group, but if people want, the drawings can be put up on the wall and each one can explain informally to the others what are the various elements of his tree or river.

- The whole exercise can take about an hour.

As we draw our own tree or river of life, and listen to the story of each others' lives, we become very conscious of the absolute uniqueness of each person's story. But then, gradually, linking up all these stories we find the story of God.

Life is the creative interaction between two stories : the unique personal history of each of us and the story of God. He is present in all of human history, and in all the things that happen to us. This interaction takes place in our lives in the measure in which we are open to the story of others. In knowing more about one another we know more about God. The tension in every religion of how the individual story meets the story of God is resolved for us in the story of Jesus Christ. In him, we find the definition of what it means to be human. In the life of Jesus, God's life becomes the human story.

As we reflect on our lives we can often see how God has acted in our lives through other people. He has called them to cooperate with him, wittingly or, more often, unwittingly, in creating us. This is one of the deepest ways in which we can understand what it means that we are made in the image of God. God is the great creator, but He has called us not only to share in the creation of the world, but even to share in the co-creation of one another.

One cannot say that all people are equally made in the image of God. Of course we cannot judge, but we know that it is to the extent that we become co-creators with him of our fellow human beings, enabling them to become more and more fully human, as Jesus was most fully human, that we grow more and more into the image of God. This is our human and divine vocation, to be co-creators of one another.

This aspect of co-creation implies a common spirit of self-sacrifice. We must be ready to lose our lives, to be converted, from isolation and selfishness, to community. Small Christian communities are the concrete expression of the church as a community committed to liberation. Through them renewal can take place at every level. It is there that, in openness and dialogue, people can experience the interaction of their own individual story and God's story.

In the small community, each one of us is challenged to personal conversion. Each one of us is challenged to face the question, 'In what way do I dominate over others?' We have to recognise that domination and dependence are not just evils 'out there', but they begin right inside ourselves. This recognition and the search for conversion makes the Christian commitment for liberation different from that in many political parties. Unless there is a change of direction in one's life, from selfishness to a life with others, we cannot be channels of liberation. This

personal and group conversion is basic if the small community is to be a 'leaven'.

The small community, in which people take an active role, works against the experience of 'mass production and stereo typing of people. For too long, , people have been made to feel helpless by society and then they are helpless. The church has reinforced this sense of helplessness. When the clergy are the only active element and the people are surrounded by Holy Fathers and Holy Mothers, then the people are kept in a state of dependence. Participation and shared responsibility become key ideas in building small Christian communities. All share the responsibility for proclaiming, communion and service. (Kerygma, Koinonia, and Diakonia).

It is important at this point to evaluate the way the group is or is not becoming a community. The following questions can help the group to become critical about the way they are developing into a community.

#### Evaluation Questions:

- a. What has helped us to experience ourselves as a small Christian community?
- b. What has been hindering us from becoming a community so far?
- c. What suggestions do we have to foster the growth of community in our meetings during the coming months?

#### E. Response to the 'Signs of the Times'

There are of course, many issues which face the basic Christian community. These issues are the realities that have to be seen in the context of the Christian message. As was said much earlier, God does not speak in a vacuum. His message to the Church is always an answer to a particular reality or issue with which it is grappling at a definite point in time. Of course, this answer does not come through the Bible by itself. We have to seek for it in a spirit of prayer and confidence that God is eager to speak to us in a personal and relevant way.

As the group progresses in this search for God's answer to the issues that are the 'signs of the times', it will discover that the response it will have to give to God's message will not be a smooth, easy, pacifying one. Rather, it will involve a tremendous challenge, which it will not be able to face by its own strengths. It will require God's help through his grace

and support to enable the members as individuals and the group as a whole to face the opposition and the difficulties that will arise from various angles.

"Happy the peacemakers:  
they shall be called the children of God.  
Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right:  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you  
and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account.  
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in  
heaven" (Matthew 5: 9-12).

"A big landowner invited me to celebrate Mass at his establishment. All his workers were there: hundreds of them. If I preach and say, for example, that one must obey one's employer, and one must work with patience and goodwill and do one's duty, for this landowner I am 'a tremendous bishop', 'a holy bishop'. But if, while speaking of the worker's duty and the landowner's rights, I have the audacity, yes, the audacity, to mention the worker's rights and the landowner's duty, then it is quite a different matter. I am labelled 'revolutionary, a progressive, a communist ...'."

Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil : *The Church and Colonialism*, Denville, New Jersey, Dimension Books, 1969, p.43.

## F. Co-Responsibility

The church is primarily a charismatic community, not a hierarchy. A few courageous bishops in the present day Churches do strongly challenge the hierarchical emphasis. One of them speaks of the church very emphatically as the 'Gift of the Spirit', because it is essentially the community of believers. The hierarchical elements are part of this, and not the other way round. There are many different gifts, given by the same Spirit. Authority is one of these, among the others, and not opposed to them. There is a specific role for the hierarchy, but always within the context of co-responsibility in the whole charismatic community.

Co-responsibility means accepting that the responsibility for the



deepening of the life and growth of the church, and the building of the Kingdom belongs to the whole community of believers. It is intimately linked with the concern for personal and community growth. The only way for the people to grow is by taking responsibility for their own lives and for the community.

It is the Christian community as a whole that must respond to the needs of the whole human community in the spirit of loving compassion which Jesus showed so strikingly in his life. This involves not only responding to immediate suffering, but trying to remove the causes of man-made suffering.

As the small basic Christian communities grow in faith and action, the role of the ordained ministers will become more, not less, clear. There is a specific role for the priest in fostering relationships at all levels. There are many gifts of the Spirit for building up the community, and among these must be included that of harmonising, reconciling and fostering true communion.

Christ came as a reconciler, and that ministry has to be carried on in the church. The priest is primarily a minister of reconciliation. He preside over the Eucharist, which is specifically the sacrament of many becoming one. As the priest exercises the role of reconciler in the Eucharist, he should also be reconciling and bringing together in daily life the members of the Christian community.

The small Christian communities should never see themselves in isolation. The parish becomes a communion of communities, and it is important that all should have a sense of the living structure of the whole church, also in relation to the wider working of God's saving will through other churches and religions.

It is very encouraging and cause for an increase in hope and confidence in God that the Church is gradually once again becoming the pilgrim church, in dialogue with others who belong to other faiths and who are also pilgrims. She is also becoming more open to the Signs of the Times.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, and the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband. Then I heard

a loud voice call from the throne, 'You see this city? Here God lives among people. He will make his home among them; they shall be his people, and he will be their God; his name is God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. The world of the past has gone.'

"Then the One sitting on the throne spoke: 'Now I am making the whole of creation new.'"

Revelation 21: 1-5

### Questions for Discussion :

- a. What has helped us during the period we have spent together in common reflection and prayer to experience ourselves as a small Christian community? Do communities of this type have any importance in the life of the church? If so, how?
- b. What would have helped us more effectively to become a community for this time?
- c. What can we do to foster the growth of meaningful Christian communities in our own situation?

## Section 5. The Basic Community and Social Transformation

We hope that throughout this book, one idea stands out clearly; namely, that a Christian, by his very vocation, is committed to work for justice. Jesus' mission was expressed in his Nazareth manifesto, to which we have often referred. Before he went up to his Father, Jesus delegated this mission to us: "As the Father sent me, so do I send you". Henceforth, it is the responsibility of every Christian to give the good news, that is a firm hope, to the poor, to give sight to the blind, to free those in prison, to liberate the oppressed and to bring the world back to a state of pristine justice (cf. Luke 4:16-18).

This mission and responsibility of every Christian was confirmed by Jesus when he said, "By this shall people know that you are my disciples, that you love one another". It was clearly specified when he said in the parable of the Last Judgement: As often as you did this to the least of my brethren, you did it to me!"

The Christian has to help those in need - that is his vocation. He cannot say "Let someone else do it", "I have no time", "I have my family,.. other work to do..." It is in showing his love and concern for others that he will find himself, and fulfill his basic mission as a Christian.

But, as has been said earlier, this does not mean that a Christian has to leave his home and his field of work to help those who are in need and those who are treated unjustly. Injustice, and the poverty which is caused by it, can be found at our doorstep. If we look around, we will find that it is our neighbour who is the victim of poverty and injustice. For who, indeed, is our neighbour? A lawyer asked Jesus this question. We find Jesus' answer in Luke's gospel:

Luke 10 :30-37

Jesus replied, 'A man was on his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he fell in with robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down by the same road; but when he saw him, he went past on the other side. So too a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him went past on the other side. But a Samaritan who was making the journey came upon him, and when he saw him was moved to pity. He went up and bandaged

his wounds, bathing them with oil and wine. Then he lifted him on to his own beast, brought him to an inn, and looked after him there. Next day he produced two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Look after him; and if you spend any more, I will repay you on my way back." Which of these three do you think was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He answered, "the one who showed him kindness.' Jesus said, 'Go and do as he did.'

It is very interesting to note how Jesus turns the question. Taking up the question of the lawyer 'Who is my neighbour?', he asks, "Who do you think was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' The neighbour is not someone to whom help is given. Rather, he is the person who helps another! Jesus' answer involves three things : First, we must help a man even when he has brought his trouble on himself, as the traveller had done. Obviously, he seems to have been a foolhardy and reckless fellow. For people seldom attempted the journey on that particular road from Jerusalem to Jericho alone. So he had no one to blame for his plight but himself!

Secondly, Jesus says that there is no scope for discriminating when it comes to helping another person. Any person of any caste, sex, creed, nation, race, or economic standard, who is in need, is our neighbour. Our help must be as wide as the love of God.

Help must be accorded to those who are victimised by other people, without regard for the retaliation that might come from them. These are the robbers of today, who defraud their victims of their economic possessions, as exploitative landlords, money lenders and employers, They are the robbers who divest them of their social status through the caste system, their sexist discrimination, their degrading them because they belong to tribal or dalit groups. They are the robbers who swindle their victims through their political systems, keeping them in ignorance, making promises, cheating and bribing them for votes in order to acquire power over them.

Fourthly, the help must be practical and not consist in merely feeling sorry. We can be sure that the priest and the Levite pitied the plight of the wounded man and felt sorry for him. But they did nothing. Compassion, to be real, must issue in deeds. This is what James tells us in his letter:



My brothers, what use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it? Can that faith save him? Suppose a brother or a sister is in rags with not enough food for the day, and one of you says, 'Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm, and have plenty to eat', but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So with faith, if it does not lead to action, it is in itself a lifeless thing.

Finally, Jesus shows us that we do not have to go out of our way to find the one we must help. It was when he was on his journey that the Samaritan found the wounded man whom he helped. He did not go out of his way looking for wounded people, victims of robbery or swindle or fraud or exploitation. This unquestionably tells us that we will find those to help not by leaving home, family, or place of work but within the parameters in which we are placed by God.

In practice, what does this mean? God has created each one of us with a specific gift or talent. This gift, as has been indicated earlier, is not only a means by which we can enrich ourselves as individuals. Rather, it is a charism, that is a gift meant for the service of others. We can use this charism, not only for earning our livelihood, but also in the service of those in need. A lawyer can use his talent not merely for making money but also in the service of those who cannot afford to come to court, a doctor can devote part of his time in serving the poor. A teacher or professor can give a slant of social awareness to whatever subject he or she teaches. They can also write in the newspapers or magazines about the situation of the poor, especially in the field in which they are specialists, - the economist about the way the economic system can be changed to help the marginalised, the sociologist about the social system and the way it can be reformed to give the right human dignity to the neglected or belittled sectors of society. A person working in an office can be alive to the problems the peons and others in lower cadres in that office find themselves, and can help them to work together towards their solutions.

Even in our homes, there are plenty of occasions to work for justice and the recognition of the human dignity of others. The way our domestic helpers are treated, the way we deal with hawkers, small traders, municipal workers, sweepers, etc., manifest our respect for their human

dignity. Our concern for the problems they face, the empathy, more than sympathy for their sufferings, our active involvement in their struggles for equity and justice, for peace and harmony in their living and working situations, are ways by which we can fulfill our Christian mission of giving the good news to the poor, of giving sight to the blind, of liberating the oppressed and of bringing the justice of the Kingdom already in our world.

If a person is really committed to initiating the Kingdom that he prays for when he says, "Thy Kingdom come", he or she will always be able to find ways within the ambit of his life, his talents and his opportunities to increase the justice, unity, understanding, integrity, harmony and love in the world.

But, it will soon be obvious that an individual alone will not be able to succeed in this spreading of the values of the Kingdom by himself. He needs the support of others. The group or the basic Christian community, to which he belongs, can provide this support to each and every one of its members. The individual members can bring the problems that are faced by the people they come across in their homes or field of work to the group. The group can reflect on these issues or problems, analyse them and try to discern their roots and then plan an action which the person concerned, aided by them, could take up to achieve a viable solution.

#### **B. The Basic Christian Community as an Initiator of a People's Movement**

This involvement of a Christian group with the issues faced by those they come into contact with in their homes and places of work is possible for all Christian communities. But some basic Christian communities may feel that they are called to work for a vaster societal transformation. They feel ready to take up the more challenging task of struggling with the people for a just, participatory and sustainable society, with a respect for the integrity of nature. At the outset they will be faced with the question which is asked by all who are involved in authentic development, namely, what is the approach that should be used to arrive at this goal? The history of development shows us that most approaches seem to have failed, because they tend to make the "beneficiaries" dependent on the implementing agency or in some way tend to reproduce the present society on a micro level with all its prevalent values of competition and disunity and rivalry.

Only one approach promises to be successful. This is the humanisation approach which works for the education and the organising of the people into people's movements which are oriented towards bringing about social justice. Why do we say that this is the only approach that will work? It is because people's movements are the real and most effective agents which can bring about a new society. People's movements can be defined as conscious, purposive efforts to bring about changes in the existing order by means of people's participation both with regard to the end, which is the vision as well as to the means, which are the politics needed to obtain the just, participatory and sustainable society.

Therefore, the inevitable aim of people's movements is people's power - since the struggle of underdevelopment is a struggle against injustice and oppression. This struggle necessitates a confrontation with power and with the handling of power. People's movements do not aim to develop participation with the existing oppressive structure as part of a mechanism designed to maintain such structures. This is too often done in various developmental approaches which start with the premise that the present structures are all right, but need to be reformed in some parts.

These latter approaches only aim at a reforming of society and its structures, that is, retaining these structures but making them perform more effectively. But a deeper analysis of society will show that it is not just the accidentals that have to be changed, but the very essence of society; of its structures and of its system that need to undergo a total transformation. People's movements are oriented to giving power to the oppressed people, so that they can control their lives and their economy, creating a just participatory and sustainable structure.

How do people's movements originate? A study of the history of various movements throughout the world has shown us that it is one or more catalysts who make others aware of their oppressive situation which is man-made and help them to fulfill their authentic aspirations towards the society we are aiming at, namely, just, participatory and sustainable society. It is to be accepted that these catalysts need not always come from the target population of the oppressed. Very often, rather in most cases, these people's movements are started by people who come from the upper or middle classes and identify themselves with the target population. There is nothing wrong in this.



We believe that if a group has been working seriously and perseveringly on this book, it can be a well formed and effective catalyst for building up a people's movement. It will first identify the people with whom it will work. This means that it has to take an explicit side with and plan to mobilise the most marginalised in its area. These might be industrial workers, domestic workers, exploited women, Dalits, tribals, landless labourers, fisherfolk, slum dwellers, or any other group that is oppressed, exploited or neglected.

In order to come to know the people well, the group will visit this slum, village or this group of people frequently in the beginning. In order not to disturb the people or cause confusion among them, it might be advisable that these visits be not made by the whole group all together, but individually or in pairs. The group must, through these visits, become familiar with the people's situation, their social structure, so that they can recognise the various groups and factions among the people, the power structure prevailing among them, etc.

From among the marginalised people that the basic group has decided to work with, it will then identify a small group from among the people who can be potential change agents or animators. This potential is manifested through their desire to change the situation of their people, and a sincere concern for others. This core group will be helped to make a structural analysis of the situation of their area and also of the wider national level. The questions of Chapter Two in this book can, with necessary adaptations, prove useful for this.

We hope we have been sufficiently stressing the importance of this structural analysis. To have a solid foundation, a people's movement must be built on a deep scientific analysis of the situation in which it exists. This analysis has to be made at every level, that is, by the catalysts of the movement, the core group and the people themselves. Here we are insisting that it be done by the core group which has been identified.

When this core group is helped to make this analysis of the situation in India, it will find that it is ridden with man-made oppressive structures. It will become cognizant of the great industrial progress made by India since it gained independence in 1947. But they will also be deeply and experientially aware of the widespread poverty, misery and malnutrition which covers over eighty per cent of its population who are either on or below the poverty line.



The analysis made by the core group will point towards certain structural causes as the source of their oppression and brings to the fore the economic, political, social and cultural consequences of class oppression and international capitalism.

The cultural heritage of the myth of blind obedience to the 'authority of persons' from above and the pervading 'culture of silence' is responsible for the pyramidal structure of political power. This is all the more enhanced by the three Bhaktas that are prevalent in Indian society right from the beginning of history. The first of these is the Pitru Bhakta. This implies the worship of one's parents, ancestors and tradition in general, and the consequent reverential adherence to whatever has been learned from them. Next comes the Guru bhakta, which means giving full respect to one who has been our teacher and hence a great hesitancy to move away from whatever has been taught us by those who are learned and who know. The third is the Raj Bhakta. This is the reverence due to the one who is ruler, - a kind of divine right of kings. The king or the ruler is looked upon as someone appointed so by God who, as it were, is his representative, and hence a challenge to his authority would mean sin on the part of the challenger.

Becoming aware of the root causes of underdevelopment and exploitation, the core group will work out a clear strategy of action and the various tactics they will have to employ to overcome the oppressive forces and obstacles to their liberation.

Through this core group, the education and analysis will be extended to the others who belong to the marginalised population of the selected area. For this education, cultural action has proved by experience to be the most effective means. For folk media, dances, dramas, street theatre and musico-drama programmes like the Therukootu in Tamilnadu, the Guru Katha in Andhra, the jathra in Bengal, the tamasha in Maharashtra, etc. have a powerful impact on the people's consciousness. When they are followed on immediately after by a discussion with the audience on the theme of the programme, such cultural actions have a very strong influence on the people's understanding of their actual situation, of the human person and society and on their hopes and aspirations. More than anything else, they can prepare the ground for the struggle that the people will have to enter into. Besides, such cultural

programmes are less likely to arouse opposition on the part of the powerful people in the village or slum.

Besides this, the core group, helped by the basic community which takes on the role of a resource team, will educate small groups of their marginalised population in the same way as they themselves were educated through the analysis and awareness building that initiated the whole process.

While the enthusiasm of the people has been built up, their actual and immediate needs are not to be ignored. A committee from among them will be formed to design and implement economic programmes for those who need them, like the unemployed, homeless, etc. Through the education process that has been going on the real felt needs of the people will be identified. The economic programme committee, helped by the basic community or resource team, can plan with the people the programmes which will cater to these felt needs. These may be economic programmes, health care programmes....

In this planning, the people will be helped to reflect on their own experiences. Through this reflection and not by our "teaching" and explaining, they must be aided to realise that the foundation of a just participatory and sustainable society are the values of cooperation, collaboration, sharing, solidarity and service, and a simple life style, which are the very opposites of the pseudo-values underpinning the present unjust system. The end product of this education process will be a list of directives drawn up by them incorporating these values, with a requirement of a regular participatory evaluation to see that these values are upheld. This evaluation will be the backbone of the on-going education which is the essential component of every programme.

With the committee and the people, the resource team can research the availability of finance in banks and local financial institutions and enable the people to approach these institutions and obtain the necessary finance. Such an experience will also lead them through a reflection on and analysis of the bureaucracy in particular and the system in general which prevents the poor from rising economically, as is their due right as citizens of India.

The resource team should support the people, as the primary agents of their programmes, to run these programmes effectively and profitably

not only to individuals, but also as a service to the whole community, so that a part of the profits can be used as share of the capital needed to start new community programmes.

However, these economic activities should not be viewed as ends in themselves, but as preparing the ground for the struggles that will inevitably follow if the people are committed to work for their own liberation.

As the number of those who have become critically aware and deeply involved in trying to work for the liberation of all the marginalised people has increased, the process will move on to the next phase. The people will realise that the issues they have been analysing are ones that concern many more people than those in their small slum or village. At the same time, the inhabitants of the neighbouring slums and villages will become conscious that something is happening in this slum or village. Either they will ask if they can join in the process. The core group can go to these neighbouring areas and try to build up an awareness of the issue among the people there. Experience has shown us that often these neighbours will themselves come and ask if they can join in the process.

The same process of education and organisation can be extended to these villages and slums, and economic programmes can be undertaken in these places as well after "economic programmes committees" have been instituted there. There is one group that tends to be ignored in the whole gamut of activities of development. This is the urban poor who do not belong to the slums or to the villages, but are living below the poverty line. They are the invisible poor of our cities, who are too ashamed to vaunt their poverty. A basic Christian community active in a city can be in a very good position to identify such people and help them to bring about their own liberation from their humiliating situation.

When a fair number of people from various slums or villages have come under the umbrella of this programme, the resource team will realise that it has the beginning of a people's movement. It should then help the people to proceed to the formation of various committees from among the people. These will be initiated according to the actual situation and needs of the people and will be constituted by representatives of the various units among the different slums or villages. Among these can be



a committee for continuing education, which will sustain the awareness building among the people through meetings, folk media, street theatre and other cultural activities.

An important role will be played by a planning committee, which will plan the strategies to be undertaken in working on an issue, the various dharnas or protest meetings that will be undertaken, the negotiations that will be needed, the procedure involved in these, the tactics to be adopted if unexpected situations arise, etc. Another committee will be the finance committee, which will be in charge of raising resources from among the people for the various actions they will undertake in the course of the struggle for their liberation. There can also be a committee for security, which will try to ensure that the people will get police support during their processions and morchas and not be harassed by the police when they undertake dharnas.

A committee which can play a very valuable role in building up solidarity among the people will be that of "community service". Its principal aim will be to provide permanent services for the handicapped, the aged and the unemployed. It will work in league with the finance committee to get resources, again, primarily from the people themselves, and then also from Government resources destined for these purposes. It is vital that whatever resources are made available, are managed by the economic programmes committee itself. This committee will be accountable to the people at regular intervals for the way it spends the funds. A general "economic programmes committee" can also be constituted to coordinate the tasks of the committees already functioning in each geographical unit.

It is important that no struggle be organised before an adequate social base of awareness creation and organisation of the people has been built up. The strength of the organisation will determine the nature of the struggle. If the organisation is limited, the struggle should be on a small issue, where success can be assured. If in the initial stages, the people's organisation takes on an issue that is too big for its numbers, it can easily be crushed. This will lead to mass frustration and disillusionment. Consequently there will be a consequent hesitation to take on any issues in future. Whereas if success is achieved on one issue at the beginning, the enthusiasm to continue with larger issues is enhanced.



Not only numbers, but also levels of awareness will decide the type of issue on which the struggle will be undertaken. The demand for share in ownership of the means of production, for example, requires a higher level of awareness building than that required for an issue concerning merely an increase in wages.

While the resource team is involved in this formation of the people's movement, it must not be negligent of its own growth as a basic Christian community. Its reflection and prayer sessions should not be neglected because of this work with the people, for they will be the powerhouses that supply the spiritual energy to sustain the members in the difficult tasks involved in helping to build a people's movement.

Finally, one of the major tasks of the basic Christian community is, as was said before, to build up relations with others working for social justice. It must try to create a network of communication for mutual support and sharing of experiences among various groups that are striving for liberation. It will not hesitate to join hands with non-Christian militant groups, or issue-centred programmes for justice at the macro-level, like the issues of feminine discrimination or nuclear arms, or at the micro-level, e.g. eviction of slum dwellers, eviction of tribals for a hydro-electric project.

Of course, the basic Christian community must take utmost care to scrutinise the ideology of these militant groups. Too often, Christian groups have discovered that the militant group of non-Christian origin, with whom they have joined forces, is a fundamentalist group, like the R.S.S. Such a coalition has generally ended in a domination over and a final repression of the original basic Christian community. Keeping this caution in mind, the basic community will dialogue with groups of other religious affiliations, to help them and help itself find age-old symbols of liberation that strike a chord in the hearts of the public.

In conclusion to this section, we would like to stress that anyone who wants to work for and with the poor and marginalised, will need several things that cannot be packed into a suitcase. For a start, he will need some personal qualities such as independence and an ability to take initiative and risks. A good sense of humour can come in handy too, as a readiness for the unexpected.

To work with the people who are dispossessed and underprivileged, one needs flexibility, because there will be many occasions when a lot of questions cannot be answered ahead of time. The hardest part about working with the poor and oppressed is the feeling of vulnerability. That is felt very much at the beginning, when the language is new, the culture is new and one is in a very vulnerable position and has to find his or her own way. But if one goes into that situation and finds that one can cope one learns not to be afraid of new experiences., Together with this, a member of the basic Christian community must have an attitude of wanting to serve, not an attitude of wanting to help. Nobody wants people who think they are God's gift to the world!

We have a hope in these communities, because they are sustained by a Spirit who is leading us to a 'new creation' of genuineness, authenticity, and effectiveness, who demands from us a 'new mentality', a new style of life, a new praxis and new approaches. It is this Spirit who challenges us to adopt new attitudes, to embrace new relationships, to seek new socio-economic structures, to devise new patterns of human and religious existence. Can we not move forward with full faith, hope and confidence in this Spirit of God?

Ultimately, the vision that the Basic Christian Community seeks to fulfill is the embodying of the Kingdom of God in human affairs. It is a social vision which :

- is rooted in experience and especially in the hopes and struggles of those hurt by our society, who have been ignored and who have no voice.

- calls the Churches to be a sign and a foretaste of a new order

- invites and enables us all to live in accordance with God's story.

- is informed by the practical wisdom of those individuals and groups who try to base their lives on principles of mutual responsibility, respect and justice

- can generate feasible policies for the renewal of our wider society.

Signs of the Kingdom will be :

When it is possible for each and every member of the community to freely take decisions in every aspect of human existence.

When the basic needs of every child, woman and man are given priority.

When the experience of the poor can contribute to the transformation of society and therefore to its salvation.

When full citizenship is not dependent on wealth, caste, gender, status or educational privilege.

When all are open and hopeful and joyful about the future and move towards it sharing the costs and benefits of social and economic change.

## CONCLUSION

The mission of Jesus was very unquestionably seen in the text of Luke 4:16-21 that we reflected on and discussed in Chapter Four. Jesus saw his mission in the first place, as bringing good news to the poor. This meant that they had a right to live as God's image and likeness and they themselves had the power to bring about their own liberation. Secondly, his mission was to free prisoners. Then, his task was to give sight to those who are not aware of their own life situation. Next, he was to liberate the oppressed and finally, to initiate the original justice in which the human community is to be living.

When he came to the end of his ministry, Jesus bequeathed his mission to those who would follow him. "As my Father has sent me, so do I send you!" He has given us his task, his Spirit and his responsibility.

As followers of Jesus, our work will be assessed by the way we implement this mission that he has given to us. It will not be judged by the hours we spend in prayer, though prayer is absolutely essential that we might have the strength to fulfill our mission, nor by the rituals we participate in or even in the Eucharist we partake of, unless it is a sign of the reality of our action in fulfilling our mission.

This mission, in continuance with the calling of Jesus, is to give good news to the poor, which is not good news for us; that is, from our point of view, but what they would consider good news. This means that we have to give them an active and authentic hope that they can themselves bring about their own liberation, in which task we will identify ourselves with them. They must have faith and hope that a new society can be built up in which they will enjoy the fullness of human dignity. We have to release prisoners, not from jails, but from their bondage of discrimination, whether racist, communal, casteist, or sexist.

We have to free people from the bonds of brain-washing which prevents their free reflection and critical awareness of themselves and their own situations. We have to give them a new sight, an insight into the socio-political, economic and cultural situation in which they live, so that they can become aware of the root causes of their oppression and liberate themselves from it. We have to strive to bring about a state of justice in which each person will have what is due to him, and in which



there will be an equitable sharing and an equal opportunity to each one to avail himself or herself of the natural and human resources of our society.

To fulfill this mission is what constitutes the living of the fullness of the Christian spirit. This service to God's favourites, who are the poor and oppressed of our country, is seen as true service of God. "Whatsoever you have done to one of the least of my brethren, you have done to Me!" It is this service that has formed the thread of this whole book.

The book has had five phases. These correspond to the five tasks that Jesus spelt out in his mission. We began with a search for a vision of society that would be just, participatory, sustainable and with respect for the integrity of creation. This vision is what we will share with our poor and oppressed people as the good news that will bring them hope. We then made an in-depth critical analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural factors of our society and sought the root causes of underdevelopment. These we identified as the injustice inherent in the prevailing system and the selfishness of every individual. This looking at realities with a new sight was what Jesus stated as a major factor of his mission.

We then moved on to analyse the various approaches to development through which we could help to release our people from their prisons of oppression, discrimination and exploitation. From there we went on to see the ways in which the oppressed could be liberated by their own education and liberation.

Ultimately, we went into a deep reflection on the word of God where we saw his view of the poor, of oppression, of sharing and community building. Against this background we could objectively see the role of the Church as it should have been performed and the difficulties which prevent it in our country from fulfilling Christ's mission. However, we realise that as Christians, each of us has this mission and its responsibility. On each one of us devolves the duty to live up to the mission that Christ has given us. But in order to be effective, we have to move from individual efforts to working as a group, as a community that lives the spirit of the Gospel and dedicates itself to working for justice and love in this world. Thus, it will be the community of God's people which will make the Church what He really wanted it to be : a sign to all the nations, a sign of the Kingdom, the Kingdom of truth and

love, of justice and equality, of brotherhood and sharing, of union and eternal life in the Father!

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## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Turning the Tide of Injustice by Desmond A.D'Abreo

Foreword by Fr. Hans Staffner, S.J.

It is a source of great encouragement that there are many Christians who have committed themselves to the work of development and liberation. Too many however, have separated their spiritual life from their developmental efforts, or have brought only a truncated section of their Christianity into play in their activities. What is needed is a vision of development in the perspective of the Bible as the unfolding of the plan of God for the building up of the Kingdom. This perspective is the fulcrum on which the whole message of this book is fixed.

The main point of this book is that for authentic work for liberation of the poor and oppressed which will have a lasting effect, it is important that there be a spiritual factor which will constitute its driving force.

The goal of development that this book envisages is the building up of the Kingdom, with its values of justice, honesty, integrity, unity, love, solidarity, peace and harmony. In the efforts towards achieving this goal, the primary role is that of the poor themselves, to whom God has given the same gifts of intelligence, understanding, love and decision making as he has given to those who are better-off.

To work with the poor to build the Kingdom is a demanding task involving a struggle against powerful structures. A single person cannot successfully fight against these structures. Only a community of people, one in heart and mind, bound together with the same spiritual convictions and committed to the cause of the 'least of the brethren' can achieve any worthwhile results. The stress of this book is on the basic community, which finds its identity and spiritual growth in the active concern for those who are deprived, marginalised and oppressed.